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MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN

HYSLOP

TEACHER'S EDITION

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MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN

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A Course for Young People

TEACHER'S EDITION

RALPH DOUGLAS HYSLOP

Illustrations by Harry Fisk

The Pilgrim Press

BOSTON **CHICAGO**

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PILGRIM SERIES is a group-graded curriculum of Christian education which gives unity to the work of the entire church school.

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A Word to the Teacher

THE EARLIEST WRITINGS in our New Testament are the letters of Paul. The Gospel narratives were written later and they were written in order that Christians in the churches which Paul had helped to establish might know the life story and teachings of Jesus. Both Paul and the early Christians believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior, God incarnate. It is in the letters of Paul that the nature of this faith and its consequences are most clearly revealed. But we will never forget that the Gospels are also results of that faith, for they would not have been written if Paul had not preached to the Roman world *the* Gospel of a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

This course deals with Paul as a man of faith and action. The author is convinced that high school young people have reached an age when they do not need or want a diluted Gospel. They are ready and eager to struggle with the great doctrines of the Christian religion if they are able to see the relevance of these doctrines to their own lives. Paul was one whose experience and belief must be understood as of one piece and inseparable. His conversion, sudden and dramatic as it appeared to be, was the climax of a process of inner change, and its results were constant throughout his life. Paul cannot be understood apart from that experience and what led up to it, nor can he be understood apart from the beliefs which determined his actions. All of these beliefs center in the person of Christ—a risen, conquering Christ who was the love and the power of God in action. It is this Paul, possessed by a vivid sense of the presence of Christ, and convinced that Christ is God in man, whom we are seeking to know in this course. We cannot study in detail all that Paul believed, all that he wrote, and all that he did. But we can hope

to know him intimately through studying the most important experiences of his life, the central and motivating convictions, and the greatest expressions of his faith. In order to do this, we must deal with theology, which means simply that we must think about God—as Paul did rather often. Our thought of God, like Paul's, will be thought which is governed by God's own revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. Again, it is the conviction of the author that young people need and want to think about God and come to know him in this way.

Strenuous Days Ahead

This course is certainly not an easy one. Paul is a very complex character and we are dealing with him at the point of his greatest profundity. Profund truths cannot always be stated in language or even in illustrative examples which can be comprehended with no effort. The author has at all points encouraged the young people to expect a challenge to their intellects and spirits, and he advises the teacher to make the same challenge. The teacher must be prepared for questions from the class that will be exceedingly difficult to answer. In some cases it is hoped that answers will be found in the text of the pupil's book or in the material that follows here. This will not always be the case, however, and the following book is recommended as providing a general statement of Christian faith which will be helpful to anyone faced with theological questions: *Our Christian Faith* by Walter Marshall Horton. (The Pilgrim Press.)

Students should be encouraged to ask the difficult questions, and often Paul himself will be found to provide answers. The important thing to remember is that we are all trying to put into our own words the meaning of belief in Jesus Christ, and we can never be content until we have related our experiences, our statements of belief, and our understanding of our Christian responsibility in one coherent whole. To do this is to construct a

theology, and Paul can help us in that task. A book that would be helpful at this point for both the young people and yourself is: *A Theology for Christian Youth* by Henry David Gray. (Abingdon-Cokesbury.)

Preparing to Teach

It will be impossible for your students to develop an interest in Paul and an enthusiasm for him if your own reaction to him is negative or passive. It might have been possible to make Paul more attractive to the general reader if some important aspects of his life and thought had been omitted or "played down." But this does not seem fair treatment of one who was himself so honest and open in all relationships. You cannot force yourself to like Paul, but you will find your admiration for him growing as you surrender your reservations and enter fully yourself into his experience of companionship with the living Christ. You may find words of your own which suit you better than Paul's words for the expression of this great experience. Well and good. The important thing is that you and the class take seriously Paul's overpowering sense of the living presence of Christ. Nothing that he did or wrote makes any sense without that. Does Christianity itself make sense without it? Preparing to teach this course may mean for you, as it did for the writer, a rededication to the spirit of Christ who is alive. The teaching of the course may mean for you and the class a new experience of the grace of God. Without that divine gift, neither you nor I, nor the class, nor Paul himself could know and understand the purpose of God. To know that purpose and to ally ourselves with it is our task and our opportunity.

Regarding the details of your preparation for teaching each session of the course, such useful suggestions have been made by the writer of a previous course in this series[1] that they are

[1] *Ancient Answers to Ageless Questions* by Harry Thomas Stock.

being reprinted here in the hope that you will make the greatest possible use of them:

"Each teacher will develop his own method of preparation. Successful teachers find it helpful to begin preparation early, to spend a few minutes on the lesson each day, to decide upon from one to three points to be emphasized during the Sunday session, and to make an outline which is subject to change if the progress of the discussion indicates that there is a better way of arriving at the goal.

"1. Read the material in the pupil's book at least eight days before the Sunday on which it is to be used. Questions in the 'Questions for Thought and Discussion' section may then be assigned to pupils on the preceding Sunday.

"2. Begin serious study on Monday. Spend a few minutes each day reading and thinking about the subject. Jot down ideas as they come to you. Make a careful final preparation on Saturday night or Sunday morning. Your study may include such steps as the following:

a. First, read the Bible passage and think about it.
b. Study carefully the material in the pupil's book. Little progress can be made until the teacher is familiar with this.
c. Study the chapter in this teacher's guide. Consider carefully the purpose as stated in 'The Main Idea.' Change the order of 'A Plan for the Session,' if you wish, or make your own 'Plan.'
d. You will usually find that there is more material than can be used. Do not plan to cover it all. Select those parts that will help you best in accomplishing the stated purpose of the lesson.
e. Be on the lookout for illustrations that will help you to interest the pupils and to emphasize the point of the lesson. Often you will read something in a newspaper or magazine,

hear something on the radio, or observe something in your neighborhood which will make a better 'opening comment' than what is printed in this book.

f. Be sure that you have thought through the answers to all of the questions in, 'Questions for Thought and Discussion,' in the pupil's book.

g. If you are not clear about any point, consult your pastor or some other person who has sound information on the subject.

h. Make certain that at least some of the pupils have read the material in their book. Those who have been asked to give answers to questions or to make reports may be reminded by telephone or post card.

i. Do not read to the class from this teacher's guide. So familiarize yourself with the contents that you will interpret the material in your own words. When you read aloud to the class you give the impression of being unprepared. Pupils expect their teachers to be prepared!"

A Session with the Map

No separate chapter in this book is devoted to Paul's missionary journeys. There is, in fact, no attempt to give a full chronological and geographical account of Paul's work. The first four chapters are biographical, the fifth and sixth deal with his letters and his sense of mission, and the remaining chapters are a study of his faith and its consequences for him and for us. It is suggested that you take time after the sixth class session to review with the map provided in the pupil's text the journeys of Paul. This can be an extra session if that is possible, or it may be done briefly in time taken from the sixth or seventh lesson. If the members of the class have attended Sunday school in other years, they will undoubtedly have had a course in Paul which emphasized the journeys. Even if they have not had such a

course, it may be helpful to trace briefly the travels of Paul, using a wall map if possible. The cities and provinces which have come down in our history as those to which Paul wrote his great letters should be particularly noted and the extent of his travel emphasized. For helpful material concerning the conditions of travel in that day and the appearance of cities, you are directed to a book which is so excellent and so well-written that you should own it, if at all possible: *Paul* by Edgar J. Goodspeed. (Winston.)

CHAPTER 1

The Man Who Had Everything

The Main Idea

It is important that the young people begin in their understanding of Paul with the knowledge that he was personally a gifted individual, and also that he had the benefit of a rich heritage—the spiritual heritage of a spiritually gifted people. He was well aware throughout his life of the privileges that had been his because of his membership in the Jewish race, because of his birth and early years in a city like Tarsus, and because of the particularly careful training that he had received as one destined to give religious leadership to his people. Because Paul himself rejected the rules by which he lived in his earlier years, it is particularly important that we see these rules and regulations in a sympathetic light. The idea that he was "in training" is a useful one for young people, for they are quite familiar with the discipline which is necessary for the athlete or for anyone who is hoping to excel in some particular line of endeavor. It is hoped that in this session some impression of the great heritage of the Jewish people can be given.

Preparing to Teach

1. Read the Scripture passage, noting particularly Paul's description of his great heritage, the evidences he gives of his high pedigree, and the statement that he has regarded all this as of no importance when he has found the meaning of Christ. Paul speaks with deep sincerity, but we should remember that before he discovered Christ he must have held the view that nothing

could be as important as his Jewish heritage and the requirements that this great heritage placed upon him and all other good Jews.

2. Read Chapter 1 in the pupil's book. Think of the city of Tarsus in the world of Paul's day as a great city, one that was filled with the evidences of a prosperous and highly developed civilization. Think of what it means today to a modern youth to be a citizen of an important nation or to be an inhabitant of a great city. Consider the contrast between Jesus, the humble carpenter's son, born in a little village and living in a small town, and Paul, who from the beginning has regarded himself as one of the aristocracy.

3. Study the section below, "Comments on the Questions," and select those particular questions which you feel will enable your class to understand the situation of Paul, the factors which caused him to be a proud and somewhat stubborn person, and the beginnings of the tension within him which will be considered in the later chapters.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Would living in a city like Tarsus be more important to Paul than big cities are to American boys today? Why or why not?* There were, of course, fewer great cities in the time of Paul, and those which had importance were given greater value for that reason. However, one may assume that in any period in history a boy growing up in a big city will think that he is more important than his country cousins who live far from the center of trade and culture. Today, the general advantages enjoyed by those living in cities and by those living in smaller places are about equal. In Paul's day this was not the case; it was necessary to go to the city to sense the onward movement of civilization and the new developments in trade, art, and literature of the day. Paul was especially aware of this in later life as he traveled

about the Roman Empire and saw even greater centers of civilization, especially Rome itself.

2. *What is the closest equivalent in this century to Roman citizenship in Paul's time?* It is interesting to point out that the wars through which we have passed in the twentieth century have ended the period when it was possible to go from country to country with very little difficulty. Certainly in the later years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century British citizenship was the nearest equivalent to the Roman citizenship of Paul's day. Probably today American citizenship is the most coveted citizenship in our world, and the best example that could be given of the protection of a great nation to its citizens might be our own care of our citizens when they get into difficulties abroad. In time of war the American government looks after its citizens who are caught in other countries, and sees that they get home safely; and in time of peace our consuls see that there is protection and the best kind of help given to American citizens as they travel abroad. This was the function of the Roman Empire in relation to its citizens in Paul's day.

3. *Are modern Jewish people generally as proud of their heritage as Paul was? Why, or why not?* Many Jews today, rightly understanding the great and ancient tradition of their people, both in religion and culture, are extremely proud of their Jewish blood. It is true, unfortunately, that the persecution of Jews throughout the centuries and particularly in our own time, and the discrimination against them in many quarters, even in our own land, have led many Jews to wish that they did not have to be recognized as Jews. It is somewhat easier for them to take this position since today there is no Jewish race as such, though we are now seeing the beginnings of a revival of the ancient Jewish nation. Many Jews do not understand or appreciate their heritage, and this, added to the discrimination

practiced against them, makes them less proud of being Jews than was Paul.

4. *Discuss Jesus' Jewish training as compared to that which Paul probably received.* Here, the earlier course on the life of Jesus will enable the class to recall the religious training of Jesus. Generally speaking, Jesus' training would have been that given any Jewish boy to enable him to understand and carry on the religious heritage of his people; but Paul was trained as a scholar and prepared for definite religious leadership. Paul was trained as a Pharisee and this meant that he was responsible for interpretation of the Law and for action by his group in controlling the religious life of the people.

5. *Do you believe that certain people or races are chosen by God?* This question will undoubtedly arouse interest, and the resulting discussion may be somewhat difficult to guide. You might point out that the Jewish people have expressed more definitely than any other race in the history of mankind this sense of being called by God. At various points in their history they demonstrated the dangers in this type of thought by assuming that their call by God made them better than other races. But their great religious leaders, the prophets, interpreted this call to mean that they had a special responsibility to be ethical in their living and to be particularly loyal to God. Their prophets taught that because God has called them for his own they are to acknowledge his ownership and show that they understand it by serving his purposes. As to whether any people today are particularly called by God, the question is answered for the Christian in positive terms: All men are called by God to live a life of love and service, and all nations are called to be servants of God.

6. *Does our church have any "laws" similar to those of the Pharisees?* The Congregational Church tradition, of course, prides itself on its lack of legal requirements or restrictions.

However, certain laws do grow up out of tradition. For instance, we usually wear our best clothes to church and, th ugh that is not a requirement, it has in some places kept away from church those who did not have suitable clothing. We have certain generally accepted rules in our church life. For instance, it is expected that the congregation will be quiet while the minister speaks and that general order will be maintained during the church service. It must be emphatically stated that we do not have the kind of laws that the Pharisees were interested in maintaining; that is, laws which governed the everyday life of the people. However, these laws, which often related to health and hygiene, are now taken over by other agencies than the church, and it must be recognized that in Paul's day many of the regulations set down by the Pharisees were useful for maintaining health and public order.

A Plan for the Session

1. Begin by asking the class whether they get the impression that Paul was a boastful person, or one who was justifiably proud of his background. You may wish to vary this opening question, but make it one which will get the class thinking and discussing the kind of person Paul was in his earlier years. Their suggestions as to what his kind of person would be like today will be helpful, and you might point out that we Americans in our pride of country and class are not so different from Paul. Then progress naturally from this discussion to the other questions. Have the class look again at the Scripture reading, and remember that Paul is writing about his early years against a background of a complete change. Even in pointing with pride to his Jewish heritage, therefore, he speaks as a man who has already given it up.

2. Try to bring the discussion to a point by showing that Paul was rightly proud of his heritage and did not necessarily show

egotism when speaking of the privileges that were his as a Jew and a Pharisee. And, regarding Paul's pride, the important point is that he accepted responsibilities as an inevitable accompaniment of his privileges. He was "in training" because he was a Pharisee. He did not simply glory in the fact that he was of the chosen people. He recognized that this involved a responsibility which he could not evade.

Defender of the Faith

The Main Idea

It was quite natural that Paul, after a childhood and youth dedicated to training for a task of religious leadership, should devote his young manhood to defense of his faith against those who were attacking it. But in defending his faith he had to consider the nature of the opposition—the life and teachings of Jesus, and the character and claims of Jesus' followers. Soon Paul was forced against his will to admit that they had something that he, for all his training and discipline, did not have. Jesus' followers had a certainty of God's love which was impossible for Paul, because he could never be certain that he was bringing all his life into subjection to the will of God. He could not even be sure that he was meeting all the complex requirements of the Law. So the conflict with the Christians, who were putting these legal requirements in a subordinate place, brought Paul face to face with a very serious conflict within himself. Believing that the legal requirements were important, he nevertheless saw that, even when they were fulfilled, peace and joy did not come to him. Yet these Christians seemed to possess what he lacked.

Preparing to Teach

1. Reading the chapter in the pupil's book, imagine the emotions that stirred Paul as he saw the followers of Jesus flaunting the laws which he considered so important. Try to understand this situation in terms of the distress you would feel if you saw a

group of people in the United States undermining the ideals which you consider vital to the nation's health and security. In reading and reflecting on the difference between the teaching of Paul and that of the followers of Jesus, go back to the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and note how natural and simple and beautiful are his expressions concerning the relationship between God the Father and ourselves, his children. Then recall the many regulations regarding the proper obedience of man to God which were imposed upon the Jewish people by Pharisees like Paul. Then you will be able to understand the conflict in Paul's mind as he confronts these two ways of knowing and being related to God.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Do you think many of the Jewish people returning to the Holy Land today share Paul's feeling about Jerusalem?* The conviction held by all Jews who had been forced to leave Palestine and live in other parts of the Roman Empire was that Jerusalem was the Holy City and still the great capital of their people. This feeling is no longer shared by many Jews, perhaps because Jerusalem has been for so many centuries in the hands of other peoples, and has become a center of conflict between many nations. The most important reason, however, for the change in feeling may well be that it has now become the Holy City of Christians, and the Jews cannot share the Christian adoration of Jesus as the Son of God, though they might be willing to accord him a place among the prophets.

2. *Do you think a minority group should try to live strictly to itself, as Paul and his people did among the Gentiles? Would there be less "trouble" that way?* Many people hold that if the Negroes in our country were segregated all difficulties would be solved. They argue that this segregation would mean no discrimination, since the Negroes would have equal opportunities

and facilities; but they simply would not mingle with the white people. In point of fact, segregation *does* always seem to mean discrimination. The Jews were keeping apart in order that they might not be defiled by others. It often seems in our time that it is the majority that do not wish to be defiled by the minority group. It is doubtful whether any kind of segregation can be practiced without resulting in violence and general dissatisfaction. It is certainly clear that such practices are not sanctioned by our Christian faith.

3. *Name several ways in which the followers of Jesus would come into conflict with the Pharisees.* In answering this question it would be well to refer to the conflict of Jesus himself with the Pharisees. You will remember that he was accused of overlooking or at least treating lightly the ceremonial laws in regard to the washing of the cup, and so forth. In addition to their willingness to mingle with non-Jews, the followers of Jesus would generally repeat his teachings and the Pharisees would denounce the teachings, as they did when Jesus first gave them to the world. The principal offense of the followers of Jesus would be their insistence that he was the Messiah whom the Jews had been awaiting.

4. *Is a "persecutor" usually someone who is uncertain of himself?* Modern psychological investigation indicates that this is usually the case. Those who attack others are generally insecure themselves and are seeking to take out their suppressed rage by this attack on a defenseless person. Paul was a very good example of a person whose fanaticism was increased by his own inner conflict. The people in our own day who join lynching parties are generally those who have a grievance against society and are able to get some relief by participating in mob violence.

5. *What kind of Messiah would Paul have wanted?* This question is not easy to answer, and the opinions of the class may differ from your own. It is probable that Paul in his pre-

Christian days would have insisted that the Messiah fulfill the expectations of his people in establishing a kingdom in which the Jews could demonstrate to the world their power to rule. Probably, also, Paul would have desired the Messiah to establish the Law in all its glory and not allow it to be put into a secondary position, as Jesus seemed to do. Certainly the Messiah that Paul at this time would have desired would be not a defeated and suffering figure, but rather a victorious leader of his people.

A Plan for the Session

Since the purpose of this session is to help us to see the great difference between Paul's understanding of the religious life and that of the followers of Jesus, it might be well to begin with the difference between Jesus and Paul before he came to know Jesus. Begin then with the question, "What would Paul have said if he had heard Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount?" Imagine what his reaction would have been if he had stood in a group listening to Jesus speak at almost any time and on almost any subject. By leading the discussion from this point to the reasons for Paul's rejection of the teachings of Jesus, it will be possible to review the training which he had received and the type of religious thinking to which he was accustomed. Emphasize here the exclusiveness of the Jews and the expectation of a Messiah who would fulfill the prophecies that were most familiar.

2. Discuss with the class the fact that we have almost no actual record of these years in Paul's life, but that we are informed in the book of Acts that he was a persecutor of the Christians and he himself makes this quite clear in speaking of these years.

3. Draw the discussion to a climax by underlining the conflict in Paul's mind as he hears and sees the results of the life lived in response to the love of God—the life of Christian discipleship.

CHAPTER 3

What Happened on the Damascus Road?

The Main Idea

The conversion of Paul, sudden as it was, had been prepared for by his earlier experiences, and especially by the conflict which had begun when he saw the attractiveness of the religion that was practiced as well as preached by the followers of Jesus. It was in direct relation to the light upon the face of the martyr Stephen in his last moments, that the light came to Paul, for it was the light of the face of Jesus Christ which Paul saw there. The conversion of Paul is tested by its consequences, and we are led to believe that this was a lasting experience as we study the life he led following his conversion.

Preparing to Teach

1. Read the Scripture passage from the book of Acts, noting that in this account Paul states that he had been standing by when Stephen was martyred. Consider also the natural reluctance he felt to return to Jerusalem where he would be among those whom he had been persecuting so recently.

2. Read the pupil's book, underlining important statements and picking out those particular passages which you wish to review in class discussion.

3. Give particular attention in your own preparation to the problem of the authentic character of Paul's experience. Consider the fact that he himself several times referred to it as the turning point in his life, and remember that the followers of Jesus certainly knew and recorded the fact that he had changed

suddenly from being a persecutor to being a great apostle. It is obvious that the experience itself had certain psychological consequences, but that is no reason for the assumption that Paul himself was unbalanced. No man who was not in possession of a healthy and vigorous mind could have done the work he did and written the letters that have been preserved in our New Testament.

4. Review the questions and your own answers to them, framing the questions in language which seems to you most interesting and effective for your particular class.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Discuss why Paul's efforts to be "right with God" were doomed to failure.* It is central in the teaching of Paul that man's efforts to justify himself before God are unable to succeed. We must realize that Paul, like many others, had an extremely sensitive conscience and perhaps an overactive sense of guilt. Even for those who are not possessed of this type of conscience, however, it is clearly impossible to fulfill the commandments of God if all of them are taken with absolute seriousness, as they were by the Pharisees. It is a problem similar to that which we face today as we consider the teachings of Jesus and realize how far we are from fulfilling them in our life in the world. Jesus teaches us that we have the help of God himself and his forgiving love. Without this teaching, it would be very difficult, if not impossible for us to feel that we were in a right relationship with God. This was Paul's situation.

2. *Compare the death of Christian martyrs like Stephen to that of one who dies for some other cause. What is unique in the Christian's death?* In Stephen's death Paul must have seen something of the spirit of love and forgiveness which Jesus himself showed. Stephen made no attempt to judge those who were putting him to death, and he was willing and even eager to give his

life for Jesus. He did not, apparently, wish to take the life of anyone else, and the very nature of his faith was such that he believed his own life was given for a victorious cause. We are probably justified in saying that the death of others who give their lives may be just as heroic as that of Stephen or other Christian martyrs, but the value of the sacrifice is determined by the worthiness of the cause.

3. *Do you think we need more Christian martyrs today?* There will always be those who will give their lives for their faith in any time of opposition to Christianity. We have lived through such times recently, and many Christians have died rather than do something that would violate their beliefs. Today we believe that we should live according to the teachings of Jesus and, if that is impossible, to be prepared to give up life itself. Our conviction, however, is that in most cases the Christian will not be called upon to make this ultimate sacrifice, but must rather show forth his faith in his living, and must demonstrate his courage and conviction in day-to-day actions, rather than in one supreme moment of sacrifice.

4. *Is a conversion experience like that of Paul generally understood today? Is some form of conversion essential to a deep Christian faith?* Not very long ago some such dramatic conversion was considered to be a normal experience for the Christian. We have come now to have a different understanding of the way in which a Christian grows in grace and in faith, and we do not expect everyone to have such an experience. It is possible that most Christians today would not understand and would not welcome, even in others, a conversion experience such as Paul had. We do believe that somewhere in his experience a Christian must come to a moment of decision when he is conscious of choosing Christ and his way in preference to other possible ways in life. Young people today often come to this decision in their Pilgrim Fellowship conferences and commit-

ment services, and we are fully aware of the deep importance of such a moment of decision.

5. *Do you think Jesus is more important as a "living spirit," or as an example for us to follow?* The thought which is so characteristic of Paul, that Jesus is with him and that his spirit is ever present, may be unknown and may seem rather strange to the class. Christian faith has always strongly emphasized this awareness of the living presence of Christ, and it is only in more recent days that the idea of the example of Jesus has been even partially detached from the sense of his living presence. We suggest here that the two cannot be separated, that if the example of Jesus is to inspire us, we are going to need, day by day, the sense of his living spirit with us. This is certainly the case if we take seriously his teaching. He said, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

6. *Why may Paul's experience on the Damascus Road be considered the most important event in history?* Those who do not accept the Christian faith would deny the important emphasis placed upon this event. However, it is difficult to deny the fact that our whole civilization has been molded by Christianity, and it is hard to see how Christianity could have advanced into the Western world, had it not been for Paul's conversion and his subsequent missionary activity. It is true that someone else might have played the role that he played, but we do not see anyone of his stature and power on the horizon of history.

A Plan for the Session

1. Begin with the account in the book of Acts and consider the interesting question that arises there as to whether this is an accurate report of Paul's own speech. The class will be interested in the apparent discrepancy between this account and the statement in the pupil's text that we cannot know with certainty that Paul actually saw Stephen die. The question is one which

does not need to delay the class too long, but it does indicate the difficulty of determining what actually happened, since Paul does not give any detailed account of his own conversion, but merely refers to the fact and to its meaning for him. This enables us to underline the fact that it was not some particular kind of experience that was important to Paul, but rather the meaning of whatever happened. The meaning was clearly an acceptance of the way and the person of Jesus as the guide for the rest of his life.

2. Make use of the questions in any way you see fit. It may be that the discussion concerning the nature of Paul's conversion will be of greater interest to the class than the relating of this event to similar events in the lives of those today. If this is the case, do not seek to make the transition from Paul's experience to that of other Christians. The important thing is that we understand sympathetically what happened to Paul, whether or not it could happen in just that way to anyone else.

Traveler and Tentmaker

The Main Idea

In this chapter we consider the preparation Paul had to make for his new task. We begin to see the way in which the pent-up energy in him is released for the performance of a great missionary work. But Paul did not begin at once to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. A great experience in the realm of the spirit, especially when it comes in such a sudden and dramatic way as it did to Paul, must be followed by a period of contemplation when its total meaning is comprehended. We consider this part of Paul's life very briefly, for we can know very little about it, and then move on to see the beginning of his work in Antioch. Paul continued to work with his hands throughout his life; he did not consider such labor beneath the dignity of a missionary. By his tentmaking he earned his bread and butter, while his great lifework was that of preaching the Christian gospel. Thus no one could accuse him of preaching for money.

Preparing to Teach

1. The Scripture reading in the letter to the Galatians is Paul's own account of his life following his conversion. Note particularly his statement that he did not talk with anyone after the experience, but went away into Arabia for a period of retirement, and then returned to Damascus. Three years later he went to Jerusalem and spent some time with Peter, which is referred to in the pupil's text. The verses in the thirteenth chapter

of the book of Acts give some of the history of the Antioch mission in its beginnings.

2. Read the pupil's text, giving particular attention to the passages which may be somewhat difficult for the class. The beginnings of the work among the Gentiles were made by those who preceded Paul; they had a conviction that they should share with others the great truth that had come to them in Jesus. The difference between the gospel and the Jewish faith, which the Greeks had already heard about, is an important one, and particularly essential for an understanding of Paul's work. He saw a greater difference than did others, for he had tested to its limits the faith of his ancestors and had found it wanting. This fact can be understood by the class if you use illustrations drawn from their own experience. A student who had taken neither of two courses offered in high school curriculum might find it difficult to understand why students who had taken both courses should have such a strong preference for one of them. From the outside, they might seem to be quite similar, but anyone who had taken both might insist that they are as different as night and day. So it was with Paul who (unlike the Greeks listening to the Jewish service but not being themselves Jews) knew by experience all that Judaism had to offer, and quickly realized that Christianity was a new and quite different religion.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Did Jesus, at any time of his life, go into the desert alone, as Paul went into Arabia?* The Gospel stories of the life of Jesus indicate that immediately after his baptism by John in the River Jordan, Jesus went out into the desert alone and there experienced a period of temptation and spiritual struggle. Apparently he, like Paul, needed to reflect upon the meaning of his new experience and to understand more fully the mission to which he was called. Paul had gone through an experience which

completely changed his way of life. That was not true of Jesus, but the need for reflection was similar in each case.

2. *Do you think that those who have positions of leadership in the church today should earn their wages, as Paul did, by some form of physical labor?* Paul, in his letters, refers more than once to the fact that the laborer is worthy of his hire, meaning that the preacher of the gospel should be gladly supported by the churches. In this day and age we require our church leaders to secure a costly education and to devote their full time to the ministry of the church. It would be difficult, therefore, for these church workers to hold any other job, particularly in a highly specialized industrial society. There are those, however, who feel that the ministry would be closer to the common life of the people if the old practice were continued. It is an interesting question and if Paul offers any answer it seems likely that he favors the latter view.

3. *What were the mystery religions referred to in this chapter?* There were many forms of mystery religion in the time of Paul. The one characteristic which all these cults had in common was that the believer was initiated in a secret ceremony by which some mysterious power was supposedly imparted to him. Many in the first century assumed that Christianity was another mystery religion, for the common meal together, with the drinking of the wine and the eating of the bread as the blood and the body of Christ, seemed to the outside observer to be the secret ritual characteristic of all mystery religions. But Christianity differed radically from these religions in its ethical requirements, and the gods of the mystery religions were merely mythical characters.

4. *Would Paul and Barnabas have been the only champions of a new religion in Antioch, or do you think there were others?* We can assume that there were countless champions of various cults, the mystery religions and others, working and preaching

in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas would differ from these others in the conviction which they held and imparted to others, that Jesus, a man who had lived in Galilee, who had preached there and had been put to death for his activity, was the incarnate God, the Son of the one true God. This historical character of the religion which Paul and Barnabas championed, in addition to its grounding in Judaism, would constitute a very important difference from any other religion being preached at the time.

5. *What important beliefs did Christianity, as Paul preached it, have in common with Judaism?* As we have suggested, Christianity agreed with Judaism in its conception of one God, the creator of the universe, the Lord of all nations, and the father of all mankind. And Jesus "came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it." His commandment was to worship and love God, and to love one's neighbor as oneself. In their ethical basis and their conception of God, Judaism and Christianity were very similar. It was only in the belief that Jesus was the Messiah (whom the Jews had long expected) and that in him the true nature of God was revealed, that Christianity differed from Judaism. But this difference was destined to become all-important.

A Plan for the Session

1. Ask the students what their attitude would be toward Paul if they were (a) members of the group that had followed the way of Jesus and had been persecuted by him and were now told that he was one of their number, or (b) good Jews, Pharisees perhaps, who had always counted on Paul as a fanatical persecutor of the followers of Jesus, and now learned that he had joined their company. Indicate thus the situation faced by both the followers of Jesus and the faithful Jews in their relationship to Paul, and also the danger that Paul faced in his relationships to his former comrades.

2. Consider with the class the interesting friendship of Peter and Paul. Mention the contrasts between the two men, and point out their kinship based on their common love and loyalty toward Jesus.

3. Take up the problem of the Greek adherents to the Jewish religion—the reasons that the Greeks were not allowed to take a full part in this religion, and the attitude they must have had toward the preaching of a more free and compelling type of faith.

4. In bringing the experience down to our own day, remind the class of the original meaning of Christian as a term of contempt and ridicule. Remind them that Paul was deliberately choosing a course which would bring him not only ridicule and opposition, but even attempts upon his life. Are we today aware of the importance of the decision we have made when we call ourselves Christian?

Called to Be an Apostle

The Main Idea

Paul was the only one of the apostles who had not been close to Jesus during his public ministry. Because of this fact and because some might think that Paul was therefore not entitled to call himself an apostle, he stresses the fact that his claim to the title comes because of his close relationship to the risen Christ. We have in Paul, therefore, a great example for our own relationship to Jesus. We are not among those who knew Jesus as he lived and taught in Galilee, but we do not for that reason follow a dead master, one whose life is real to us only in the stories that have been told about him. Like Paul, we can be the companions of one who walks with every generation and challenges each person to a new life and a new commitment. Paul's claim is that he is an apostle because he has suffered with Jesus and served him and loved him. Above all, Paul has made known his name and his great works to all men. It is because Jesus brought Paul from death into life that Paul has dedicated his life to him. And this dedication marks the beginning of a life which goes down in Christian history as the most influential of all except that of Jesus himself.

Preparing to Teach

1. The Scripture passage for this lesson is of great importance, for it recounts the high lights of Paul's experiences in the service of Christ. Read the passage, noting the very human quality of it, for Paul is under some pressure from those who are appar-

ently claiming to have a better right than he to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul, in writing these words, is aware that he is boasting of things that are really not important, and this makes his testimony all the more impressive. He has suffered greatly, but his weakness is really the source of his strength, for he recognizes that it is only the power of God that has enabled him to do what he has done.

2. It may be helpful in preparing for this lesson not only to review the pupil's book, but also to go back in the New Testament to the record of the calling of the disciples. This material will be found in the early portions of the Gospels and is important in showing the contrast between the calling of the twelve and the manner in which Paul came into the company of the followers of Jesus.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Do you remember how the twelve disciples came into fellowship with Jesus? How were they called?* The Gospels of Matthew and Mark both give accounts of the calling of Peter and Andrew, and the other pair of brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. In the accounts in the fourth chapter of Matthew and the first chapter of Mark the men are simply asked by Jesus to leave their nets and become "fishers of men." There is little information about the calling of the other disciples, but one receives the strong impression that they were all called from their common tasks to join Jesus' fellowship and become part of his company.

2. *Paul felt that he had particular assets for his work with non-Jewish people. Remembering his early life and training, can you say what these assets would be?* Certainly one of the first would be his Roman citizenship, which he received as his birthright. Another would be early life and education in a city which had been strongly influenced by the Roman civiliza-

tion. Paul was educated as a Jew, but was undoubtedly influenced by the Roman culture, and he had the ability to write and speak in Greek. A further preparation for his work with Gentiles would be his contact with them in his early years and his appreciation of some of the teachings of the Greek philosophers and the claims made by the various competing religions in the Roman world.

3. *Are any of the portraits we have of Jesus known to be accurate? Do we have anywhere in the Gospels a description of his physical appearance?* There is no authentic portrait of Jesus. Those which are popular today are simply imaginative reconstructions. Certainly the portraits which give to Jesus the appearance of a Western man are inaccurate. It is interesting that there is not a word of description of him in the Gospels. The writers apparently had no interest in his physical appearance. We may assume that he was rugged and of strong physique and personality, for strong, outdoor men were immediately attracted to him.

4. *How much is known about the disciples after the night when they all fled, as Jesus was being tried before Pilate? Where do we turn in the Bible to find their story?* Peter, of course, is the most prominent of the disciples, and his story is found in the early chapters of the book of Acts. We must turn also to this book, the first Christian history, for the story of the other disciples. There is very little told about them, however. The legend still persists that Thomas, the doubter, went to India and founded a Christian church there. There are legends concerning others of the disciples and, of course, the Roman Church claims to have its foundation in Peter as the first head of the Church.

5. *Paul was not the first to see Jesus after the crucifixion. Can you name some who saw him before Paul did? According to the Gospels, to whom did Jesus first appear?* Paul himself

says in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus, after he was raised from the dead, appeared to Cephas, that is, to Peter, then to the twelve, and then "he appeared . . . to more than five hundred brethren at one time." Finally, Paul says, "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." [1] The beautiful story in Luke 24 speaks of the appearance of Jesus to the women, Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary, the mother of James, on the Emmaus road near Jerusalem. In Matthew 28 is the story of his appearance to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary in the garden where the tomb was. According to most accounts, Jesus appeared first to the women and then to the other disciples; Paul's version, that he appeared first to Peter, is probably his understanding as given him from Peter himself.

6. *Do you think Paul is less to be relied upon than Peter as an interpreter of the teachings of Jesus?* This question raises the very difficult problem of the possible distinction between the "historical Jesus" and the "Christ of faith." Paul may be said to have distorted some of the teachings of Jesus by laying such great stress upon the risen Christ and upon faith in Christ. Paul was the first great personality to be captured by the thought of Christ as the revelation of God. Peter, because he was so close to Jesus, must necessarily have failed to see some of the radiance that was apparent to Paul. Also, Paul may have been less bound by his background than Peter, who, after all, was scarcely able to free himself from allegiance to the Jewish faith and way of life. The question cannot be answered with finality. Your own answer will depend largely upon your previous convictions and experience. Try to help the members of your class to see the strength and weakness of both Peter and Paul.

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[1] 1 Corinthians 15: 5-8, from *The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament,* copyrighted, 1946, by the International Council of Religious Education. Used by permission.

A Plan for the Session

1. You might ask the class to imagine themselves a group of Gentiles to whom Paul has come and preached the gospel. Following his stay with them, another has come among them disputing Paul's claim to be an apostle and pointing out that Paul was not one of the original group of disciples. This person has made the further accusation that Paul is misrepresenting the teachings of Jesus, that Jesus never meant to have a gospel preached to those outside the bounds of Judaism. Let the class imagine themselves in the position of a group of Romans or those of Greek background in the Roman world, and decide whether they would accept Paul, or reject him according to the suggestion of the man who opposes his claims.

2. Having discussed Paul's right to be an apostle, suggest that the class consider his qualifications and determine whether these are so outstanding that Paul's claim must be accepted on the grounds of his unusual ability to carry on the work of Jesus.

3. Make such use of the questions as you can, remembering that the class may find one particular question of far greater interest than the others. If possible, turn the discussion toward the question as to the relationship between the Jesus who lived and taught in Galilee and the risen Christ who is the inspiration and leader for the Christian Church of the first and succeeding centuries. If the class can come to grips with this problem and its significance for them, this discussion will have been of unusual value.

4. Close with a brief prayer, thanking God for the living Christ and his fellowship with us in the Christian Church.

With My Own Hand

The Main Idea

In this chapter we begin to consider the Paul whom the letters reveal. It is necessary to understand why the letters were written, how they were written, and how they were sent to the churches. It is also necessary to help the class understand that these were not letters written for posterity. They were included in our Bible because of their tremendous value as a record of the faith of Paul and the fellowship of the early Church. The letters of Paul reveal both Paul's character and the significance of Christ for him and for Christians through the ages.

Preparing to Teach

1. The shortest letter in the New Testament, that written to Philemon, is assigned as the scripture reading for this session because the letter is a personal one and has an interesting revelation concerning the nature of slavery in the ancient world. Read the letter carefully, noting the way in which Paul seeks to awaken a Christian to a sense of responsibility for putting his faith into action. One scholar has developed the theory that the runaway slave, mentioned in this letter and commended to his master, Philemon, is the same man who later became a great bishop in the Christian Church.

2. If it is possible for you to bring a papyrus scroll or even a papyrus sheet to the class, it will enable them to understand the type of letters which Paul wrote and the materials he had for writing. If this is not possible, you may wish to do a little re-

search on the early letters of the ancient world, and report your findings to the class.

3. You may wish to ask the class the week before this session to follow out the suggestion in question 4, each of them writing a letter to the Christians in your town as though he were Paul, having visited them and now writing from another place. These letters would be interesting in their different views concerning the Christian life in your community, and would also serve to make vivid to the young people the kind of writing that Paul did.

Comments on the Questions

1. *In what language were the letters of Paul written? How did it compare with that used by Jesus? With that used by the great philosophers and dramatists of ancient Greece?* The letters of Paul were written in the common Greek tongue. Jesus used Aramaic, and there is no record of his having written anything except the time when he knelt and wrote in large letters upon the ground. The language used by the philosophers and dramatists of ancient Greece was what we call classical or literary Greek. The letters of Paul were written in the everyday language of the people, not the language used in great literature.

2. *Would you be likely to write long, or short letters if every letter you wrote had to be carried by a man traveling on foot, on horseback, or on a boat, to its destination?* Obviously, Paul's letters were long, not only because he had many things to discuss with the churches, but because he could not write frequently. He was dealing with great themes, but he was also attempting to bridge the gap of many miles and many days in sharing his deepest convictions with the people he loved. He was building the Church even while he was absent from the churches he had founded.

3. *Can you think of anyone besides Paul who was a great*

letter-writer and whose letters are preserved to this day? There are several famous letter-writers in history, but perhaps none that would be known to the class. It might be mentioned that Benjamin Franklin wrote many witty and revealing letters during his stay in Paris as representative of the newly formed American states in our post-Revolutionary period. From the ancient world no other letters like Paul's are preserved. It is significant, however, that much of our knowledge of the historical and social background of New Testament times comes from personal and business letters which have been recovered.

4. *Imagine that Paul was writing a letter to the Christians at _____ (fill in the name of your own town). What would he have to say about you, after having paid you a visit and then gone on?* We suggested that this question might be made the basis of an interesting experiment with the class, if everyone were to write a letter, imagining himself as Paul, a recent visitor in your town. It would be interesting to get the different views concerning Christianity in your community. It might be possible, also, when the letters have been read or reviewed, to point out that everyone writes a letter from his own standpoint, and none of us is quite able to step into another person's shoes.

5. *Perhaps we do not share Paul's enthusiasm for belonging wholly to Christ. We want to belong only to ourselves. Does anyone remain free from bondage to someone or something? What are some of the things by which people in our time are enslaved?* Most of us cherish the illusion that we are able, if we wish, to live a life of complete detachment. But actually, of course, we are governed by our loyalties, and the pupils might find it interesting to enumerate some of the loyalties which govern their lives. Certainly many people in our time are bound to luxuries and to earning money and to keeping up their place in society. None of these things is necessarily bad in itself, but when

they become the major goal in life they give one a wrong perspective of life. Young people are often slaves to social prestige. These things are important, for they do determine the direction of our lives.

A Plan for the Session

1. If you have asked the class to write letters, begin by having several of these read, noting the important points that come out in the letters. Are the letters written in the common language of the people to whom they are addressed?

2. Having considered the problems involved in writing letters to people whom one may never see again, go on to a consideration of the important things that Paul is attempting to do in writing these letters. He is not just renewing pleasant acquaintances. He is seeking to water the seed that he has planted and thus assure its luxuriant growth.

3. Take up the problem of Paul's use of the term "slave" in describing his relationship to Jesus. Is Paul guilty of excessive adoration of his master at this point, or are we expected to follow in his steps in showing such complete loyalty to Jesus that it could be said of us that we bear the brand of his ownership upon our hearts? This question may lead into the general problem of Paul's over-expressive language. It might be well to end the session by reminding the class that the great figures in history have never been those who were so completely balanced that no one could accuse them of any kind of excess. Paul can well be accused of having "gone overboard" in some of his expressions and actions, but the fact remains that he made Christ vivid to countless people, and inspired them to withstand all manner of persecution.

To Live by Faith

The Main Idea

Faith is trust in God, and we are able to trust God only when we have found that we are not sufficient unto ourselves. But Christian faith is response to God's love, not a claim made upon God for reward. Paul teaches us that we must move from self-reliance to trust in God, and from dependence upon the Law to a life of love. This is the theme of this chapter. It is the central strand in Paul's teaching, and it is based upon a double knowledge: of himself as he is by nature, and of Christ as the power of God which sets him free from himself.

Preparing to Teach

1. Read the Scripture passages, keeping in mind the fact that Paul in the Letter to the Romans is presenting a carefully prepared statement of his belief. In the verses from the first chapter, he is pointing out the serious consequences of the refusal to recognize and revere the truth of God. In the portion read in the seventh chapter he expresses vividly a common experience of conflict in the will—a conflict from which we can be delivered only by faith in Christ, he says. These and all of the readings from Paul's letters will be more meaningful if read from a modern translation such as Weymouth, Moffatt, or Goodspeed.

2. In reading this chapter in the pupil's book, note those passages which will require explanation. Some members of the class may not yet have experienced conflict of the will, or may

not have become aware of the gap between aspiration and performance. Try to make this type of experience believable to them, even though it may not yet be their own. Reference here to Paul's early attempts to fulfill all the requirements of the Jewish Law may be helpful.

3. Read carefully the questions for discussion and the comments that follow. You may wish to alter the form of certain questions. Use the questions to draw out the experience of individuals, for their experience will not be radically different from that of Paul.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Why do we often resent those who are always successful? Is it because they are tactless in their winning—or is it because the very fact of their winning emphasizes our failure to win?* Honesty compels us to admit that even the most gracious and tactful friend, if he were always successful in every undertaking, would strain the ties of friendship. This is because we naturally resent being shown up as less able than another. It is also true, as Paul knew, that we feel insecure and guilty, even if there is no reason for it, when we ourselves are unsuccessful.

2. *Think of the persons you care most about and feel closest to. Is it true that their friendship does not depend on your success or popularity?* Our truest friends are those whose relationship to us is not altered by circumstance. They see in us something that is good and worthy of respect. They care for us, not because of our victories, but rather because of what we are despite victories *or* defeats. We know young people are approaching maturity when they begin to form friendships on this basis.

3. *Do you agree that God has a right to claim obedience from us? Why, or why not?* This is one of the most important questions in religion. The Old Testament reveals different concep-

tions of the relationship between God and men, but the great conclusion of the Hebrew religion is that man is required to obey the laws of God. Immanuel Kant, the greatest philosopher of the Western world, spoke of the "categorical imperative"—the "ought" that is part of man's very existence. The moral basis of life is established on this rock: that man is responsible to God for his actions, and that God is just and righteous. Therefore, God can and does demand obedience—but his laws are just. "For what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

4. *If we obey God, ought we to be able to claim his love as our right? Why, or why not?* It would seem that we should automatically deserve God's love as reward for our obedience, but the insight of Christianity is otherwise. We can make no claim on God, though he can properly claim our obedience. The book of Job, in the Old Testament, is in part a study of this problem and declares that God, the creator, is infinitely greater than his creatures and they are not to question his ways. The New Testament, however, begins not with man's claim on God, but with God's gift to man.

5. *Do you think Paul put too much emphasis on the love of God as something quite different from the law of God? How much influence did his early training and his conversion experience have on his thinking at this point?* Undoubtedly Paul is expressing his reaction to early training in his condemnation of the Law. Yet he recognizes the place of the Law. We need not follow him in making so marked a distinction between love and law, but will do well to recognize with Paul that the love of God is as far beyond calculation as it is beyond expectation.

6. *If you were asked to tell what faith means to you, what would you answer?* This is a question directed to you, the teacher, as much as to your class. It is an intensely personal question. If you cannot answer it in terms of a personal relationship

to Christ as Savior, it will be difficult if not impossible for you to understand and interpret Paul. This does not mean, however, that you must agree with all of Paul's language, or use it yourself. The experience is the important thing.

A Plan for the Session

Here are two possible ways to plan and carry through this session. Decide which you prefer—or develop one of your own.

A. Begin with Paul. Considering his Jewish background, his education as a Pharisee, and his conversion on the Damascus Road, discuss:

1. The reasons for his conviction that every person is seeking to justify himself before God.

2. His belief that the Law, necessary as it is, leads to despair.

3. The change that faith makes in the whole of life, as Paul sees it.

B. Begin with our own experience. As high school students in a competitive society, educated to believe in achievement and its rewards, and only slightly, if at all, influenced by Christian beliefs, discuss:

1. Our attempts to win security and self-esteem by victories in different areas of our life.

2. Our "idealism" and its consequences. That is, our thoughts and aspirations for better selves and a better world, and our disillusionment when we and the world fail to measure up.

3. What would be a satisfying and enduring faith? Would it be anything like Paul's?

Close with statements of faith by members of the class and a prayer for stronger faith in God and deeper trust in him.

Our Lord Jesus Christ

The Main Idea

This chapter is the heart of the course on Paul, for it attempts to make clear what Paul meant when he used these most important words, "our Lord Jesus Christ." The heart of Paul's faith was his belief in Jesus as the revelation of God. In Jesus, Paul saw God as he really is, a loving God, acting in our behalf. This is necessarily a theological chapter, in that we are concerned with the nature and purpose of God. Our thinking about God, as Paul reminds us, is always related to our love for and loyalty to Jesus. Jesus is our guide and teacher, but more than that, he is the revealer of God. Jesus' suffering upon the cross is a revelation of God's love for us, reminding us that God loves us in spite of the suffering we bring upon him by our sin and selfishness. When we come to know God in this way, Paul says, then we give ourselves to him in gratitude for his gift to us.

Preparing to Teach

1. The Scripture passage, 1 Corinthians 2, is Paul's expression of the faith by which his life is governed. Read this passage carefully, reflecting on its meaning for us today. May it not be that we have attempted to substitute our own wisdom for this "hidden wisdom of God"? You cannot argue your class members into a belief in God, but you can express your own faith in Jesus Christ and tell what that faith means, and you can show by your daily life the results of that faith. By this means, you may be able to guide them to a fuller understand-

ing of the meaning of the Christian revelation. This will be your task, and your preparation will be spiritual rather than intellectual.

2. Reading through the chapter in the pupil's book, underline those points which you think will need further explanation, and consider the questions as possible sources of illumination on these points. Where the questions do not bring out further meanings, formulate your own questions and your own explanations.

3. In this chapter the questions regarding Paul's right to interpret Jesus may be better answered than in the previous session. For, if Paul was right about Jesus, there are parts of Jesus' teaching which could not be fully revealed as long as Jesus himself lived on earth. A most important part of his teaching was the example of his life, including his death. In other words, perhaps Jesus, in spite of his greatness as a teacher, needed Paul to follow him and interpret the total meaning of his life to men. This is true if Paul was right in his faith that God was in Jesus, and that he acted in him to save the world. God's saving work was not complete until Jesus' death and resurrection.

4. The climax of Christian faith is the understanding that Christ died on a cross for our own sins. This may be a difficult concept for young people, but they are certainly mature enough to realize that the forgiveness promised in the Christian gospel must cost something. Nothing so great can be achieved without suffering. Whether or not the class members are able to come to a personal realization of the meaning of the cross, the discussion should bring them to the point where they will realize that there is so much wrong with the world today that our best wisdom and our highest aspiration cannot put it right. Somehow it must be put right by God, who is still and always at work, turning the suffering of men into a triumph rather than a defeat.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Was Paul right when he decided to "know only Christ and him crucified"? Should he have continued to argue with the philosophers as he once did in Athens? Is it possible, by philosophy alone to come to full knowledge of God?* Paul was deeply convinced after his experience at Athens that he must not attempt to argue with the philosophers and others who sought truth through a speculative method. His strategy was apparently correct, for if he had converted the philosophers they would not have formed a Christian church, but rather a philosophical society. It is quite clear that Paul, by giving a strong testimony to the power of God in Christ, was able to win men to personal loyalty to Christ, a loyalty that persisted in spite of all obstacles, and created a living fellowship. One may well question whether by philosophy alone one can ever come to full knowledge of God, since the philosophic way is one of intellectual searching, rather than wholehearted commitment.

2. *Does the thought of the immensity of space, the millions of light years between our earth and other solar systems, make you feel lonely and lost?* Individuals will differ in their reaction to this question, but it is probably safe to assume that most thoughtful young people are struck by the smallness of earth and our own existence in relation to the immensity of space and time. The assumption of the religious thinker is that all of this immense space and time are the creations of a God who can relate himself personally to the men and women who are also his creation. However, this general religious belief does not easily dispel the sense of loneliness felt by the individual as he contemplates cosmic space.

3. *If human beings were really to know God, could there have been any other way for God to give that knowledge than by becoming man?* The Christian answer to this question is that God had to become man in order that man might know God. As we

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consider what the Christian faith really means, we realize ever more clearly that it is faith in a God who so loves us that he will make himself known to us in unmistakable ways. This calls for his entering human life and giving it divine significance.

4. *Jesus said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." He also said, "I and the Father are one." Does that mean that when we feed the hungry children of Europe and help to clothe those who are suffering, we are also serving God? What does this mean in regard to cruelty and violence in killing thousands with an atomic bomb? Are we causing God to suffer?* The Christian way of life emphasizes the fact that the children of God are bound together by a common relationship to their Father. The service we owe to God is a service to our fellow men. When we unselfishly serve others and sacrificially share for their comfort, we are paying our debt of gratitude to God. He does not need our service, but we need to serve him and thus serve our fellow men. In like manner, it is clear that we are causing God to suffer and are actually attacking his power and glory when we resort to violence and do wrong to our fellow men.

5. *Would we have Christianity as a faith and fellowship today if Jesus had run away from danger and death?* Your answer to this question depends upon your estimate of the importance of the cross in the Christian religion. It is hardly possible to imagine the gospel without the note of suffering and sacrifice. And the teachings of Jesus are not in and of themselves so unique that they would have survived had not the teacher sacrificed himself for his faith and love. It was the willingness of Jesus to accept death for the sake of others that gave his teachings the ring of authority. He lived—and died—according to his teachings. The disciples were first discouraged and then drawn together into a new and vital fellowship by the crucifixion and the resurrection. You cannot separate those two great events, and without them it

is impossible to imagine the birth of the Christian Church. Jesus, perhaps, knew that this would be the outcome.

A Plan for the Session

1. The fourth question may provide the best starting place for discussion of this chapter. If you begin here, or even if you begin with some other question or part of the pupil's book for discussion, it would be best to emphasize the common experience of all of us in coming to know the love of God through the love and concern of another person. That is where Christianity begins—with the love of Jesus and his great concern for all people, a concern so great that he was willing to lay down his life for his friends.

2. The question as to whether Paul was right in his centering of faith on the point that Jesus in his life and death reveals God more fully than any philosophy, may be discussed not as a matter of speculation, but in relation to the experience mentioned in point 1 of this suggested plan.

3. The parable of the shepherd and his search for the one sheep that was missing from the flock of one hundred is the best illustration of Jesus himself, for the early Church most often pictured Jesus as the shepherd with the lost sheep carried in his arms or held about his neck. The discussion might well come to its point in the assertion, which we find in the teaching of Paul and which is referred to in the pupil's book, that God himself is the shepherd, as Jesus illustrated. What Paul pointed out is that God and Jesus are one. The good Shepherd is the God who, in Jesus, seeks his own.

4. Close the session with a prayer expressing gratitude to God and to Jesus in whom we see the ever-present and ever-seeking God.

God's Love and Ours

The Main Idea

A Christian scholar, Dr. Newton Flew, has said, "Religion in the New Testament is grace; ethics is gratitude." This puts in remarkably clear language the main idea of this lesson. As Christians we are not urged to love each other as though that were something within our capacity, unaided. We are given the gospel, the good news that God has loved us with a love beyond our understanding, but not beyond our experience. In answer to this great love, we love our fellow men. The world is suffering from too little love, but this is not because men have made no effort to love one another. It is primarily because men are unaware of the great truth that God has freed them from the terrible self-centeredness that characterizes human existence without God, and has given them freedom to answer his love by willing service to their fellow men. This conception of the love of God and the ensuing responsibility to love our fellow men is summed up in Paul's great hymn to love in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians.

Preparing to Teach

1. Read over several times the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. Remember as you read it that Paul was no stranger to hatred, violence, jealousy, and suspicion. He himself had felt all of these emotions deeply and had suffered from the attacks of others who were motivated by similar feelings. He was aware

that the Corinthians to whom he was writing were themselves often quarrelsome and suspicious. He is here speaking out of his deep faith in God. To him the love of God is so real and so certain that even these magnificent words are hardly adequate to describe it. As you prepare to teach, reflect upon the manifestations of God's love in your own life, and the gratitude which wells up within you as you remember how richly you have been blessed.

2. Read Chapter 9 in the pupil's text. Underline and make notes on those passages which you think might be difficult. Consider ways in which you can express in your own words what the author is seeking to express in his.

3. Note that the author in this chapter has used no illustrations coming from the life of high school young people. It may be that you can supply some. Note also that the illustrations which are employed are those drawn from the suffering and tragedy in the world today. Do not leave the class with the impression that men's lives are examples only of this kind of selfishness and of the tragedy which results from it. Prepare illustrations from your own experience, preferably stories of men who have been so moved by the love of God that they have shown forth a truly God-like understanding and sympathy for others.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Can you give examples of individuals or of groups who have sought to organize the whole world for their own benefit? Can they succeed?* This was apparently the intention of those who so recently led the German nation. We must not imagine that they were a different kind of being from ourselves. These were men who had carried to the limit the tendency within all of us to use others for our own ends. We Americans express this tendency when we forget that those less fortunate than ourselves

are still entitled to respect as persons of infinite worth and dignity. Our nation runs the risk of being hated for its superiority in material things unless we can demonstrate also a superiority in things of the spirit—in humility, self-sacrifice, and loving service.

2. *Why do we say that love cannot use force? Would it be better if God could and did force us to do his will?* Love has its own weapons, but violence is not one of them. The life of Gandhi might be referred to here as an illustration of the eternal truth that he who would serve his fellows must risk even death in order to be true to the principle that love willingly suffers but will not willingly cause others to suffer. If God forced us to do his will, we would no longer be free, and without freedom we could not love him as he desires and deserves to be loved.

3. *Are we able to love others without regard for their intrinsic qualities of lovableness?* Perhaps only the true saints are able to love others in the way that God loves all of us. We usually develop affection for others because of something in them that appeals to us. It is apparent, however, that Christian love is love that does not depend upon qualities of lovableness in the other person. Perhaps we are not capable of this kind of love until we have suffered deeply and have come to know the meaning of the cross.

4. *Is it easier for us to love others if we ourselves are certain that we are loved? To be specific, do you think you are able to be kinder and more loving than a homeless orphaned war refugee, simply because you have always known a home and the love of parents? What does this tell us about the way wars start and seem to grow out of past wars?* Those who are now seeking to bring some order into the chaos of war-torn countries tell us that a new generation of homeless and deeply troubled children has been created by the war. We must expect that these persons, as they grow into adult years, will show the deep effects of the early

maladjustments caused by their bitter experiences. Unquestionably, it is easier for us to be understanding and kind, than it is for those who have known only brutality and loneliness.

5. *Do we really believe that God loves Japanese, Germans, Jews, and Negroes as much as he loves us? If we believe it, why do we act as though we did not?* The answer to the second question may seem to call for a confession on the part of all of us, a confession that we are not really Christian. Perhaps it is good for us at times to make such a confession. At any rate, we ought to face squarely the fact that we are not living up to our claims of loyalty to Jesus. However, we can only say, when we have been sincere about our faults, that we will seek the help of God to do better. This one thing more we can say—namely, that we will begin to regard our fellow men as brothers because we have come to a new understanding of the meaning of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Paul has certainly helped us to know the meaning of these great terms.

A Plan for the Session

1. The best plan for this session may be one which largely disregards the pupil's book and goes directly to Paul's great hymn to love in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. Against the background of this chapter in Paul's letter, read in the class session, take up the questions for discussion in what seems to you the best sequence for discussion. It would probably be helpful to the class to include in this session some direct and courageous statements about the failure of Christians to live up to their own standards. We are tempted to blame the world's ills on the Nazis and others who have demonstrated in an extreme form the greedy desire to organize the world for their own benefit, but the class will need to be reminded that Jesus was often hardest on the respectable people who considered themselves virtuous. In other words, we ought to look into our own hearts first.

Fellowship and Freedom

The Main Idea

The freedom of a Christian is freedom in fellowship; it is freedom for a purpose. The Christian is not bound by legal formulae, by rules and regulations. He is freed by the spirit of Christ to have the mind of Christ, to minister to his fellow men, and to do those things which build up faith and freedom in others. Paul had to deal with Christians who were not used to freedom and did not know how to use it. In writing to the churches in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Philippi, and in Rome, as well as to the churches in Galatia, Paul found it necessary again and again to emphasize the fact that the Christian life is lived in fellowship. We cannot be Christians all by ourselves. This means that we must consider what our acts mean in the lives of others.

Preparing to Teach

1. Read the two Scripture passages from 1 Corinthians 14. Try to imagine the situation in Corinth that prompted Paul to write this letter. If you have ever been in a religious service in which people stamp and shout and give free reign to their emotions, you will understand what Paul is talking about. If you have never attended such a gathering, try to go to one, or read about one, before you teach this lesson. It will be a great help to you in dealing with the question that is before the class.

2. Consider the teaching of Paul in relation to his whole life—

had he, in the early years of his life, known what it meant to be part of a warm and supporting fellowship?

3. The lesson you are teaching is one of the most important considerations before the free churches today. Think for a minute about the problems facing these churches, including our own Congregational Christian Churches. Remember that we are devoted to the principle of freedom whereby a local church determines what its own life and service shall be. What is the responsibility of such a church to other churches? The young people will find this an interesting question to discuss in relation to their Pilgrim Fellowship group.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Do you know churches today where Paul's view of the place of women is upheld? Can you give an outstanding example of an action of a national church body which expresses the opposite conviction?* Certain churches today refuse to ordain women to the Christian ministry. This is true of the Episcopal church, for instance. However, the women are given an important place in the church. One can mention, perhaps, the attitude of the great theologian, Karl Barth, who expressed at Amsterdam his conviction that women should be in a secondary position in the church because Paul had shown that this was correct. In general the churches in Europe may be said to follow this teaching more closely than those in the United States. In 1948 our own denomination elected a woman, Miss Helen Kenyon, as Moderator of the General Council.

2. *Have you ever attended a modern service where people spoke "in tongues"?* Some of the young people may have attended such a service. It will be important to guard against their reacting in scorn and derision to such religious emotion. If you have been in a service of this kind, you may be able to suggest some of the values in such experiences without, of course,

indicating approval of all that goes on. Point out the dangers, too.

3. *Do you think our churches lack enthusiasm?* This will be an interesting question to young people, and their frank answers should be welcomed. Do not be surprised if they express a feeling of need for more warmth and enthusiasm in the church service and in religious activities generally. Our modern churches often discourage any expression of emotion.

4. *Do we have in our church life an experience of fellowship like that which Paul was seeking for the Corinthians? If not, what is it we lack?* This question follows naturally after the preceding one and will give further opportunity for frank criticism and expression of opinion by the class. In discussing this question it may be possible, naturally, to point out the fact that real fellowship demands every person taking some responsibility. It may be that our churches lack true fellowship because so few people contribute anything.

5. *Have you ever been part of a group which had such a high morale that your life seemed to take on new meaning because of your membership in this fellowship?* The answers to this may indicate the places in our modern life where true fellowship exists. Face this question squarely yourself, and if you are able to give a clear answer to it, do not withhold that answer from the class. It may be that the Church does this for you, but if some other group does it, do not hesitate to say so. If the Church does not, what can be done about it?

6. *Do Christians need fellowship, or can we get along in our religious life quite well by ourselves?* Many persons seem to feel that religion is a private affair. Discuss with the class this feeling and the reasons for it. Would Paul have been satisfied with this position? Obviously he would not, and the discussion should derive some light and truth from Paul's own teachings on this matter.

A Plan for the Session

Two possible plans are outlined below, either of which would seem to lead naturally from the experience of the group to the convictions which are so important in this chapter.

A. Begin with the description of some religious meeting characterized by deep emotion spontaneously expressed. This would probably not be a service of the First Congregational Church, but rather of one of the groups which we call sects. From this experience, either of your own or of some person in the group, go on to criticism of the type of worship there represented, a criticism which should be appreciative and not merely negative. Indicate the lacks in such religious expression, and ask what Paul's advice would be. Recognizing the values in emotion, go on to consider why it is that much of our religion seems to lack this emotional vitality, and consider with the class what sort of expression of this kind of feeling would be acceptable.

B. Begin by discussing those experiences of high group morale which have impressed you and the class, and which seem to heighten life's meaning. Contrast these experiences with the typical experience of the individual Christian attempting to worship God all by himself, or with church groups which seem to lack reality in their worship and activity. Consider the reasons for the failure of churches to provide this heightened experience of life's meaning and value. Try to develop constructive suggestions for the life of your church and the Pilgrim Fellowship, using Paul's own teaching as a basis.

God for Us, God with Us

The Main Idea

This is a chapter on salvation. The word is used at the close of the pupil's text, and the attempt is made to give content and meaning to the word before it is introduced. What is meant by salvation is something quite simple, yet profoundly significant. It is a combination of the love and power of God. God *for* us means that God loves us and is on our side in our struggle to live a better life, a kinder and more loving life. He has enabled us so to live. God *with* us means that we have in all of our striving the presence of God and the assurance that his power is in us. The combination of these two is the Christian experience of salvation. This is not something remote from the experience of our everyday life. We know what it means to be saved when we seek to follow Jesus and find that we have him by our side.

Preparing to Teach

1. Read Paul's words in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans. Here are terms which may need interpretation for the class, such words as "justifies," "intercedes," "God's elect," "raised from the dead." If possible, discuss with your pastor the meaning of these terms and possible words which can be used to express their meaning more adequately to the young people.

2. Work out your own answers to the questions at the end of the chapter. Then check your answers with those suggested in "Comments on the Questions" below. Allow these questions to

stimulate your own suggestions and illustrations for use in the class session.

3. Consider carefully question 5 and your own answer to it. If possible, write down some alternative terms for the words which seem to have little meaning for you. This may be easier for you after you have talked with your pastor.

Comments on the Questions

1. *How often do we pray to God for a special favor: to escape from some unpleasant situation or danger? Should we pray for these things at all? Would it make a difference if we added the words, "nevertheless, thy will, not mine, be done"?* You will remember Captain Rickenbacker's description of his experience on the raft when it seemed that prayer was answered. That was a thrilling and not uncommon experience. Certainly it would be harsh to say that one should never pray to God for something that is deeply desired; rather we might conclude that we always ought to pray for those things which we do most earnestly desire. It will make a difference in our prayer, however, if we add the words of Jesus and remind ourselves that perhaps God has a different plan for us than our own. If his will is done, it may be better for us than if our own desires were answered.

2. *Have you known people who seemed to triumph over the troubles that came to them? What has seemed to you to be the secret of their strength?* Here your own experiences as an older and more mature person will be most helpful to the class, but they, too, have known—among their own friends or among those who are in the community—persons who have seemed to possess an added strength in time of difficulty. Their answers as to the secret of this strength will enable you to understand what they believe to be the source of the power that is within us.

3. *Does the knowledge that God forgives us make us any less sorry for the wrong we have done?* In thinking about this, re-

member what was said earlier about the cost of forgiveness. Rather than making us less sorry for our wrongdoing, knowledge that God's forgiveness is so costly should make us more deeply regret what we have done. This, at any rate, is the experience of those who have most fully understood and lived the Christian life. It is easy to be forgiven only if one does not understand how much forgiveness really costs. No one who has come to grips with Christian truth will ever feel that his sinning and his selfishness are of little importance.

4. *Is it true that victory and defeat are less important in themselves than is the attitude with which we enter into both experiences? A football coach may be fired if he loses too many games, but would you want as friend and counselor in a crisis in your life someone who had never been defeated?* This question is an important one for young people to consider. Success is a very important factor in life for us at all times, but especially when we are young and have not learned how much defeat there must be in life. It is far more important that we be educated by our defeats than that we seek to avoid them.

5. *Do you think we should give up words like "Holy Spirit" and "salvation" because many people today do not understand their meaning; or should we put new meaning from our own experiences into these words? Could you do this?* The class may wish to attempt to put their own meaning to these words, and if so, this will be an interesting session. If these words are to be rejected, what can we put in their place? Are the words of less meaning to us because the experiences they represent have come to be strange to us? These are more questions, but they should help you find the answer to the fifth question.

A Plan for the Session

1. Begin with the experiences of those who have triumphed in adversity because of their faith. Ask the class for illustrations

out of their own contacts, and supplement them with your own.

2. Consider how differently persons react in the same situation, some becoming bitter and resentful, and others finding a way to learn by their suffering, and even finding their own lives enriched and their personalities made more radiant by what they have been through.

3. Ask the class what kind of person Paul was. Would he have been an interesting and enjoyable companion on a journey? If so, to what can one attribute this resiliency? Was he by nature a tougher person, able to stand adversity, or had he learned something important through his fellowship with Christ?

4. Close the session by referring to question 1, as to the kinds of prayer the Christian should offer. End with sentence prayers by the class, in which they pray for those things which are best for them, whether they are pleasant and attractive or not.

CHAPTER 12

Christ for All the World

The Main Idea

In the earliest days of the Christian Church there was danger that the fellowship which had begun in remembrance of Jesus would deny his greatest teaching. Paul was able to catch the vision of a gospel for the whole world, and it was by his labors and because of his courage in insisting that the gospel be taken into the Roman world that Christianity became a world-wide religion. Paul saw clearly that no requirements of the Jewish law must be placed as a barrier between Christ and any person who would come to him. He insisted that Peter and the others agree to this freedom, which for the Jews was a very startling departure. Paul preached a world faith and won a world for that faith. It is our task today to keep Christianity free from bondage to any particular race, class, or set of customs.

Preparing to Teach

1. Read in the letter to the Galatians Paul's account of his Jewish background, his conversion, his early work, and the conflict with the Judaizers. You will find this in the section beginning with 1:11 and continuing through the second chapter. Then read carefully the passages selected for reading by the class, and be prepared to put these into their proper setting in this letter of Paul.

2. Organize carefully in your mind the arguments of Paul and those of his opposition. Think out carefully what would be

the parallel arguments in our own time, that is, the arguments given by those who insist that Christianity must be above all barriers of race, color, class, and nation, and by those who seem to want to confine Christianity to white Americans of the so-called upper or middle classes.

3. Review the questions and the suggested answers, but consider first your own answers to the questions, and then turn to those given as guides for your thinking.

Comments on the Questions

1. *What are some of the ritual observances required of a Jew today? Why do members of the Roman Catholic Church not eat meat on Friday? Have we any such requirements in our church?* The number of Jewish laws observed by any particular Jew depends to a large extent upon the branch of Judaism to which he belongs. Orthodox Jews observe most of the traditional ceremonial requirements regarding daily worship, celebration of festivals, restrictions on foods; and it is customary for all Jews, now as in the time of Paul, to be circumcised. The Roman Catholic Church requires abstention from the eating of meat on Fridays, and the observance of various fast days through the year. Our free churches require no special observances, but provide opportunity for Christians to enter voluntarily into a number of such ceremonials.

2. *Is there anything to be said for Peter in his shifting from one position to another regarding the Christians and the Jewish law? Can you remember any other time when Peter said one thing and did another?* Peter was undoubtedly under very strong pressure from the Jews in Jerusalem. It was difficult for him to sustain a position which he would not have taken of his own accord. When Paul's strong influence was withdrawn, it was natural, though perhaps not forgivable, for Peter to relapse. Peter seems to have had the tendency to take a stand rather vehe-

mently and then find himself unable to carry through. We remember the night of the trial of Jesus when Peter denied that he knew him, according to Jesus' prediction.

3. *Are there any in the Church today who correspond to the "Judaizers" of Paul's day in insisting on particular rituals as a sign of true Christian discipleship?* It is unfortunately true that most churches are in the position of insisting that some particular form of worship, baptism, celebration of the Lord's Supper, or other ceremonial is a requirement for membership in the church and for Christian discipleship. One honors these traditions, but finds it difficult to feel that in them the whole of Christian life can be summed up.

4. *Do you find it difficult to believe that Christianity is unique? Or, to put it another way, do you believe that God is truly and fully revealed only in Christ, and not in Mohammed or Confucius or Buddha?* Our modern temper is such that we feel that any claim for uniqueness on the part of Christianity is in the nature of intolerance. Nevertheless, the Christian revelation, if it is true, must be unique. Perhaps many of the class will deny that God is more fully revealed in Christ than in the great figures of the other religions. If this is their position, it should be honored, but it is possible to point out the very real differences between the revelation of God in Christ and that in Buddha, or other leaders. In fact, one must conclude that the latter simply do not worship the same God. Therefore, one has to decide whether he believes in the God of our Lord Jesus Christ or in the god of Mohammed or Confucius or Buddha.

5. *A Chinese Christian has said of us, "You take your Christianity too much for granted. I am glad I am a first-generation Christian, for I know how much it means to be a Christian." Do you think he was right?* A common reaction of Christians from other lands where the Christian Church has very recently been planted is that American Christianity is far too complacent. We

American Christians do not realize the great gift we possess. We are too much inclined to accept it without understanding its implications. We have come to identify Christianity with our particular way of life and have not realized that much in our way of life would be condemned by Jesus. Perhaps we need to be reminded by these first-generation Christians that every person should be a first-generation Christian; that is, each one of us must be born anew in Christ if we are ever to realize his fullness of life.

A Plan for the Session

1. Begin by reviewing for the class the experience of Paul as set forth in the letter to the Galatians. Help them to understand why this letter is so vehement, and what great issue is at stake.

2. Help them to understand sympathetically the position of Peter who did not really want to make Christianity an exclusively Jewish sect, but was not strong enough to maintain a very difficult and even dangerous position after Paul had left him.

3. Discuss question 3 with the class, and indicate the ways in which Christianity today tends to become less than a universal and world-encircling faith.

4. Approach the problem of the uniqueness of Christianity by way of Paul's own conviction that God is revealed in Christ as the God and Father and Savior of *all* men. In discussing the claims of Christianity, indicate the ways in which all the truths in other religions and in other realms of human existence are summed up and given full significance in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Our Christian Task

The Main Idea

Paul's mission was to win men and women, not to himself, but to Christ. Though he was weak in many ways, and was plagued by illness and troubled by many adversaries, he was able at all times to endure because he put his trust in a master and friend who never let him down.

Our Christian task is to be like Jesus—to know him and serve him as we do his work in the world. His work is the work of the Father who sent him. He wants us to join him in the great task of building the kingdom of love and righteousness. Through faith in him and daily companionship with him, we can begin here and now to live in that kingdom. Wherever Christ is Lord, there is the Church.

The mark of the Christian which stands out above all other marks is loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the distinguishing feature of Paul's life and all of his theology; all of his ethics can be summed up in his great words—"Yet not I, but Christ. . . ."

Preparing to Teach

Prepare carefully for this final lesson. If your study thus far in the course has given you the impression that Paul is so unlike ourselves that he can be of little help as a guide for young people, seek to answer in your own mind the questions that are raised in this chapter. In the first place, did Paul desire men to

take his own life as their example, or was he always pointing beyond himself to Jesus? In the second place, is it true that Paul is a different kind of person? Did he not have many of the same weaknesses and temptations which are common to all of us? If we think of him as a superior kind of being, have we really attempted to understand the man who is revealed in the letters? In discussing with your class the whole meaning of Paul's life, be sure that the central teaching of Paul is your own major teaching; that is, that supported and surrounded by the strength of Christ's love, we are able to do all things. Among these things that we are able to do only because we are helped by the spirit of Christ is the bringing of others, and particularly youth, to him. Let us, as we come to this last session, pray that our words have been those which would serve to make "the way, the truth, and the life" more clear.

Comments on the Questions

1. *Can you give an example in American history of a man about whom so much has been written emphasizing his greatness that he no longer seems a very real or understandable person?* This has been the fate of George Washington, for, although his biographers have been almost without number, most of them have succeeded in making him seem to be an unreal character. Part of the price that a great figure must pay for the respect and devotion which he inspires is this possibility that he will seem to be something other than a human being.

2. *Give an illustration of Paul's prejudice or unfairness to others. Would you like to have been in disagreement with him?* There are many indications in Paul's letters that even those who love him are at times hurt by his harshness to them. This is clear as one reads the letters to the Corinthians, and in reading the letter to the Galatians one is impressed by the very strong language used by Paul and the possibility that some who are coming

under his condemnation are not really deserving of it. He would unquestionably have been a rather severe opponent in an argument and it is quite possible that Paul, when he was wrong, was just as unyielding as when he was right.

3. *Are we accustomed to thinking of the early Christians as quite different from ourselves: more courageous and more full of Christian virtue? Can you think of Christians today who have shown an equal courage in the face of persecution and have even died for their faith?* We have followed the usual course in placing a halo around the first examples of a particular way of life. It is true that the early Christians manifested great courage and devotion, but it may be questioned whether they were as fine in every way as some of our glamorous versions of them indicate. Even a hasty reading of Paul's letter indicates the very common clay of which these people, like ourselves, were made. In our own times we have seen Christian martyrdom; during the dark years of the war large numbers of Christians died rather than surrender their Christian principles. Particularly moving examples can be given of the work of Christians in Europe in saving Jews from persecution and death at the risk, and often at the cost, of their own lives.

4. *What proofs could you give, if asked, for the statement that "Jesus Christ is alive in our world today"?* For this answer, we must all look into the world and into our own hearts. The proofs, in the end, will depend upon the faith that we bring to the question itself.

5. *What can you do in your own personal relationships, and as a member of a Christian fellowship, to share in the work of Christ?* The course we have been engaged upon is concerned primarily with an understanding of the faith by which Paul lived, and the results which it had in his own life and may have also in ours. If the hours spent by you and your class in seeking to understand the life and thought of Paul have been of any

value, this question will bring forth a number of possible answers. Paul's own life suggests most strongly, we feel, that the primary task of the Christian is to live a life guided constantly by the example of Jesus. The person who so lives will inevitably bring others into that way of life.

6. *We come in the end, not to Paul as our leader, but to Jesus. Is this what Paul would wish?* There can be no doubt that Paul desired his followers to be followers of Jesus. The questions he raised when men divided into little groups, one claiming Peter, one claiming Apollos, one claiming Paul—these questions were directed to the very heart of the Christian life. Paul felt that unless men could be united in service of Christ, the Christian fellowship itself could not long endure. So in concluding a study of Paul, we are led back with new understanding and devotion to the task of making the Church one in fellowship, in prayer, and in service.

A Plan for the Session

This session you will wish to organize in accordance with the particular needs of your class. It might be well to ask each member of the class to contribute his or her own summary of the life and work of Paul. This should be a personal judgment, not one which is unduly influenced by the material presented in the pupil's text. If Paul has "come alive" for the young people, it will be because, in his own letters and in his vivid portrayal of the meaning of Christian faith, he has demonstrated a power to reach across the years and inspire others who are followers of Jesus.

Conclude the session with a prayer that we may all be better disciples of our Master.

MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN

A Course for Young People

RALPH DOUGLAS HYSLOP

Illustrations by Harry Fisk

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Foreword

YOU ALREADY KNOW at least two facts about Paul. He traveled widely, establishing churches throughout the Mediterranean world; and he wrote to those churches numerous letters, some of which are preserved as part of our New Testament. But—what really happened to the Jew, Saul, to turn him from his bitter persecution of the followers of Jesus to a life of brilliant leadership among them? What experiences caused him to write as he did to the Galatians, the Corinthians, the Romans and all the rest? Did Paul, who never knew Jesus, rightly interpret the teachings of Jesus? What importance does Paul's faith have for us today?

We shall seek answers to those questions in this study of Paul. There is much that we must leave out. We are not tracing his travels in details on a map. This journey with Paul is a trek of the spirit. Paul walked with Jesus and this was more important to him than any travel on land or sea. What does it mean to walk with Jesus? What are the evidences of a person's close companionship with him? What are the marks of a Christian?

Even to begin to answer these questions is to go deep into the experience and faith of Paul. He was a great man, but his thought is not simple, nor is his life without contradiction and complexity. It is really impossible to know Paul without struggling with some of the great problems in the realm of theology. Christian thinking is not easy, even as Christian living is not easy. Both require determination, courage, and devotion. Paul had these qualities in heroic measure. The more we demonstrate them, the better we shall know and understand him. To know and understand Paul is to become a better disciple of Jesus.

The Mediterranean world in the days of Paul

The Man Who Had Everything

Philippians 3:4–15

THOUGH I could rely on outward privilege, if I chose, whoever thinks he can rely on that, I can outdo him. I was circumcised on the eighth day after birth; I belonged to the race of Israel, to the tribe of Benjamin; I was the Hebrew son of Hebrew parents, a Pharisee as regards the Law; in point of ardour a persecutor of the church, immaculate by the standard of legal righteousness. But for Christ's sake I have learned to count my former gains a loss; indeed I count anything a loss, compared to the supreme value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. . . ."—*Philippians 3:4-8 (Moffatt)*

This is the Apostle Paul speaking. We will never understand this man who has meant so much to the Christian faith through all its history until we begin to understand the pride with which he could speak of his heritage even when he was turning his back upon it. In a very real sense this man was born into privilege. In terms of the things that mattered in his time, he had everything.

Man of Tarsus

The city in which he was born was no country village like that into which Jesus came at his birth. Tarsus, on the Cilician plain a few miles from the Mediterranean Sea, had an interest-

ing history and an important place in the commerce and culture of its day. There, the Roman Cicero had lived while he was governor; and Antony had summoned Cleopatra to meet him at Tarsus. There was a university in the city, famous as a center for the study of philosophy. The Emperor Augustus had given Tarsus the title of "metropolis" and the right to issue its own coins. Here travelers from East and West met, for all had to pass through the Taurus Mountains by the near-by Cilician Gates, and ships came up the Cydnus River from the sea. Paul could say without boasting that he was "a citizen of no mean city."

He was more than a citizen of Tarsus, a free city and a metropolis. He was a Roman citizen. As proudly as Cicero, whose orations many of you have read, Paul could cry *"Civis Romanus sum*—I am a Roman citizen." This citizenship he inherited from his father who must have had it conferred upon him in return for significant services rendered to Rome. Paul did not regard his Roman citizenship lightly, for it guaranteed him preferred treatment throughout the Empire. In later life it was to gain for him justice in Roman courts and escape from the punishment that fell upon many less fortunate men.

"I Belong to Israel"

Yet it was not the superior Greek culture of his native city nor the Roman citizenship, which granted him privileges throughout the world of his day, that most distinguished Paul as an aristocrat. If he were to boast, he says, it would be of his pure Jewish ancestry. "I belonged to the race of Israel, to the tribe of Benjamin." His name as a Hebrew was not Paul, which is a Roman name, but Saul. The great warrior-king of Israel, whose exploits were known to every Hebrew child, had given this name great and lasting glory. When Paul says that he belonged to the race of Israel, he is remembering that the people of Israel regarded themselves as chosen by God for a particular role in

history. As one of the tribe of Benjamin he affirms his membership in an important kingly clan, much as a Scotsman might proudly announce himself as one of the royal Stewarts. The crowning glory of his heritage is summed up in the phrase "a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents, a Pharisee."

"A Pharisee as Regards the Law"

To the Pharisees, religion was the greatest thing in life.

We are already prejudiced against the Pharisees, no doubt, for we remember that Jesus denounced them as hypocrites. Before we dismiss them, however, we should understand what they stood for and why Paul was proud, at one time, to be one of them. We must remember something of the long and varied history of the Hebrew people, their understanding of their relationship to God as those who are chosen, and their realization that this choice involves certain definite responsibilities. In the beginning the religion which was founded upon this sense of being chosen by God was not personal so much as tribal in its character. The whole people must serve God by living righteously, and the performance of certain ceremonies of worship was necessary, too. Prophets emphasized the former and priests the latter aspects of religious living. But as the people suffered defeat and exile and the fall of their great city, Jerusalem, their religion naturally became more personal and the relationship of a single individual to his God began to seem more important. In the days of exile, too, the rules and customs of worship were committed to writing, and they became the Law—very important, even sacred, as the visible symbol of Israel's identity and loyalty to God. The right interpretation of the Law was of the utmost importance. The Pharisees were the ones who interpreted the Law for the people, and who, above all others, cherished and protected the Law and tried as individuals to live up to its strict demands.

A Man in Training

It is not difficult to understand the thrill that came to Paul as he thought of what it meant to be a Pharisee. He was "in training" for a great cause. He had to live according to strict rules that were physical, mental, and spiritual in their character. But these rules were not something arbitrary that he could not understand or accept; to him these rules confirmed his people's greatness and assured his own future. We know little of Paul's early years, but we are certain that he learned the thrilling history of his people and knew himself to be part of that history. He knew he was training for high office and a place of leadership among his people. The knowledge that he was well-born and highly privileged did not make Paul haughty and overbearing; it only made him strive more fiercely to be worthy of his inheritance. There was nothing he would not do to prove his loyalty to his people and to the religion which made them unique among all the peoples of the world.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Would living in a city like Tarsus be more important to Paul than big cities are to American boys today? Why?

2. What is the closest equivalent in this century to Roman citizenship in Paul's time?

3. Are modern Jewish people generally as proud of their heritage as Paul was? Why, or why not?

4. Discuss Jesus' Jewish training as compared to that which Paul probably received.

5. Do you believe that certain people or races are chosen by God? Explain.

6. Does our church have any "laws" similar to those of the Pharisees?

Defender of the Faith

Acts 7:54 — 8:4 and Galatians 1:13–14

PAUL PUT first in his life and loyalty his Jewish belief. His religion was not only a way of thinking, but also a way of living. As a boy growing up in a Greek city, he could not help being affected by Greek customs and Greek culture. Naturally he took part in athletic events, for they were an important phase of Greek civilization. He spoke and read the Greek language. Yet he was a Jew and, being a Jew, he was convinced of the necessity of keeping somewhat aloof from all the other influences which came into his life. We can understand this if we remember that the "Jews of the Dispersion," like Paul, were those Jews living outside Palestine who yet looked to that country and its holy city, Jerusalem, as their spiritual home. You can imagine how devoted you might be to the United States and to the way of life which we know best, if you were forced to leave this country and live all your life outside its borders. Yet our devotion to our native land cannot be compared to the devotion of the Jews to the land which they regard as holy, because that is where their ancestors found God. To Jerusalem every Jew must journey, for there and there alone can he worship in the Temple and fulfill the highest commandment of his religion. Paul must have made that journey in his youth, and he may have gone there to live and to study with the great teacher Gamaliel. From this teacher Paul doubtless would have received further encouragement in

his attempt to satisfy the full requirements of the Law while living among the Gentiles.

It would have been impossible for Paul or any other Jew of Cilicia to avoid all contact with non-Jews. He and his people were a small minority in that land. However, he could avoid any mingling with Gentiles in worship and in the practice of his religious acts. Since these involved so much of his life, he must have had to be constantly watchful to see that he did not break this rule which required separation from those who were without the Law. Apparently Paul found this constant vigilance a strain, as any person would. If he had been less conscientious he might have been happier. But he was convinced that he could serve his people and his God only by the most rigid adherence to the requirements of the Jewish Law. Those who were lax and careless, Paul believed, were threatening the very basis on which all hope for the Jews must rest. He heard it rumored that some Jews even denied the importance of many of the requirements of the Law which all good Pharisees had pledged themselves to uphold and practice. These were the Jews who claimed that a certain Jesus, who had lived and taught in Galilee and died upon a cross in Jerusalem, was the Messiah.

The Crime of the Christians

Talk about a Messiah was nothing new to Paul. The prophets long ago had foretold the coming of one who would deliver his people, Israel, from bondage. He had heard many different interpretations of the prophecies and many descriptions of the awaited deliverer. Within Paul's own lifetime various persons had claimed to be the Messiah, among them this Jesus of Nazareth. This, in itself, would not have aroused Paul's anger against the followers of Jesus. If these people who claimed that Jesus was the Messiah had been willing to observe the Law strictly

To Jerusalem every Jew must journey, for there and there alone can he worship in the Temple and fulfill the highest commandment of his religion.

and to confine their work to Jews, Paul might have considered them misguided, but hardly a menace to Judaism. Their crime was that they followed their master Jesus in denying the equal importance of all requirements of the Law, and they even suggested that the God of Israel loved *all* men as much as he loved the Jews! Of course, Judaism had always claimed that there is only one God, but all men had to become Jews before they could be acceptable to God. These followers of Jesus were insisting that Jews and non-Jews might come together in the worship of God who had sent his Son to announce the coming of the kingdom of God on earth. For Jews to worship with non-Jews was bad enough, Paul thought, but they were even eating together, which was strictly forbidden by the Law.

Paul was so deeply disturbed by these things that he became a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. He attacked them not for negative reasons, not because he was a cruel and vindictive person, but, as he says, because of his "ardour." He loved the Jewish Law so much that he hated those who broke it. He may not have realized it, but probably his punishment of others for their betrayal of Judaism gave him the satisfying feeling that he himself was being absolutely loyal. For he was a person who could never feel quite sure that he was doing everything he ought to be doing. If he were tormented by a suspicion that he himself was falling short, even though trying desperately not to, it would have been only natural for him to "take it out" by attacking others who were obviously betraying their faith.

The great problem was that Paul had got himself into the position of attacking a way of life that actually offered more than his own. The more he persecuted the followers of Jesus, the more he came to realize that his strict observance of the Law was not satisfying to him. He might have been able to force himself to continue in the strict and narrow path he had chosen if he had not begun to attempt to force others back into that path.

The freedom that they had achieved was something for which he was secretly yearning. The more he opposed that freedom in them, the more he desired it for himself. He was like a man who has chosen to live in prison and believes that all should live behind bars. When he goes out to bring back into the prison those who have escaped, he discovers, against his will, that life was not meant to be lived in a prison.

The Gift of Love

The unique thing about these followers of Jesus was their sense of God's love as a free gift. Their leader had taught them that God is like a father who loves his children even when they have been disobedient, not like a judge who delivers a verdict concerning their actions when all the evidence is presented and carefully weighed. Instead of requirements which must be met before the favor of God will be conferred, the followers of Jesus spoke of a love so great that it poured out its richest gift for men who had already broken most of the rules. The God who so loved the world that he gave his son Jesus to live and die for all men simply did not fit the Jewish idea of a God whose favor must be won by ceremonial observances. This God of love asked only an answering love like his own, and it was this love of man for his fellow man which characterized the followers of Jesus and bewildered Paul, the persecutor. They seemed to be free from the anxiety and strain which Paul continually felt. They *knew* that God loved them, but Paul, in spite of all his striving, could never be sure.

So, the more Paul defended Judaism by attacking those who departed from its way, the more he became dissatisfied with it. No one could have made more valiant attempts than he to live up to the Law, but the satisfactions that should have come were sadly missing. These renegade Jews, who paid so little attention

to all the things he considered important, were winning what he sought but could not find. His last acts of persecution must have been frenzied and bitter. The conflict within his mind and heart was so great that some kind of explosion was inevitable. Paul was headed toward the Damascus Road.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Do you think many Jews returning to the Holy Land today share Paul's feeling about Jerusalem? Why, or why not?

2. Do you think a minority group should try to live strictly to itself as Paul and his people did among the Gentiles? Would there be less "trouble" that way?

3. Name several ways in which the followers of Jesus would come into conflict with the Pharisees.

4. Is a "persecutor" usually someone who is uncertain of himself? Explain.

5. What kind of Messiah would Paul have wanted?

What Happened on the Damascus Road?

Acts 22:1–21

MANY YEARS in the life of Paul are blank as far as our knowledge is concerned. Scholars do not know enough facts even to write a biography about this man who lived nearly two thousand years ago. As with Jesus, almost nothing is known of his early years, and the various accounts we have of the most important events in his life differ from one another. Unlike Jesus, however, Paul left to posterity a number of letters which, though not written as autobiography, do contain important information about his life. In addition to these letters we have the record of his work contained in the Book of Acts, written by a man who knew that the events he was recording were significant and would be studied in later years. From these two sources, we are able to gain the principal facts about one of the most amazing experiences a man has ever had.

Stephen's Death

The conflict within Paul had reached a dangerous point. In persecuting the "followers of the Way," as the earliest Christians were coming to be known, Paul was seeking an outlet for his own sense of frustration as he sought in vain to "be justified" by observance of the Law. It is important to understand what Paul meant by those words, or rather by the idea behind those words.

You have heard the expression, "get right with God." That is what Paul was trying to do. He wanted to be able to feel that he had done all that was necessary to have a right relationship with God. But the more he did, the less certain he became that God had accepted him. He had gone as far as he could go along the path that he had chosen, but he had found no joy and no peace.

The Book of Acts describes the death of the young Stephen, an ardent follower of the Way. (The early Christians spoke of themselves as followers of the Way—Christ's way.) He had outraged the authorities by preaching about Jesus as one whom they had betrayed and murdered, and for this they stoned him to death. As the story goes, "the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a youth called Saul." This other young man, then, watched the terrible death of Stephen and we are told, "Saul quite approved of his murder." It was a terrible death, in one sense, for stoning was cruel and bestial; yet Stephen died heroically with words of forgiveness for his enemies on his lips. If this Saul who stood watching was the man whom we have begun to know, we can imagine the mingled emotions of hatred and pity, fascination and horror which gripped him. Here was one dying because he had denied the Law and betrayed his religion. He deserved to die, yet he showed courage and love and radiance in his last moments far beyond anything his judges and executioners had ever known.

We cannot know with certainty that Paul actually saw Stephen die, for he does not mention this experience himself. We *do* know that in those he was attacking he saw something that was better proof than all their words that their Way was as good and strong and hopeful as the man of Galilee who had first walked upon it. Paul, hurrying to Damascus to carry on his campaign of violence, suddenly found himself face to face with that man.

The description of his experience in the Book of Acts is more

detailed than Paul's own words. Nowhere in his letters does he speak of the blinding light and the voice, but he does say that he has seen his Lord, Jesus. Whatever the outward circumstances may have been, the thing that happened cannot be denied, for it transformed a persecutor of the followers of Jesus into a steadfast and committed follower, the kind of man you would tremble to see lined up on the side against you. For him it was all or nothing. He had given everything he had to one way of life and now suddenly he was ready to give everything to a new way.

Light out of Darkness

The words Paul uses to describe his experience are the words that any of us might employ. We say, when we have finally discovered the meaning of a difficult passage in a book, or the way to work a problem in algebra: "The light dawned." Paul said, "It was the same God who in the beginning said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness' who shined in my heart that day to reveal the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Does it not seem to you likely that Paul had been deeply impressed by the light in the eyes and the radiance in the face of young Stephen even as he faced death? As Stephen died he was looking into the face of his master, Jesus, who had himself faced death with courage and forgiveness, as now Stephen was doing. And as Paul made his way along the highway to Damascus, he could still see that radiant face of the man he had seen put to death, and the strange light that was upon it. The Damascus road passes through a narrow gorge beyond the Jordan river—the gorge of the Yarmuk. It is a rocky pass wrapped in shadows through which the traveler ascends from a point 700 feet below sea level to the great plain that stretches away to Damascus, 3,000 feet above. Out of the shadows into the light walked Paul, and as he walked his heart and soul were flooded by a strange light, the light of God.

Suddenly the unrest that had been increasing within him came to its climax. The battle that had been raging was ended. Now he knew that the God whom he had been seeking to serve by his fanatical devotion to the Jewish Law, and by his persecution of the followers of the Way, was a God of light and love and joy. Out of his love he had created men that they might love him and serve him with their whole lives. Paul realized that this was the God for whom the whole world was seeking, a loving Father who sought men, not that he might judge and punish them, not even that he might claim their religious loyalty, but that they might have fellowship with him in every aspect of their lives. Paul was concerned about his own life, but he was also eager to find an answer to the needs of men who, like himself, were groping for answers to the greatest questions the human mind can ask. Now the answer had come, and Paul knew that God himself had come into his life.

God had come to him in the form of a glorious light in the face of Jesus Christ. Throughout his life Paul was to keep as the most vivid memory of this hour the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This was to mean for him that no matter how dark might be the prospect, nor how difficult the task before him, he could be certain that Jesus Christ was with him as his comrade and guide, and could bring him through. More than that, Paul from then on was confident that this Jesus of Nazareth, who had been put to death on a cross, was a living Spirit, present with every man or woman who believed in him and followed him. And to be with Christ, for Paul, meant to know the presence of God.

A Changed Man

"But what kind of exaggerated imagination is this?" Many others have asked that question, and you have a right to ask it. The only way it can be answered is to go on with Paul. I think

you will admit that a kind of illusion or hallucination might temporarily change a man's life and cause him disturbance but, unless he were insane, the effect would gradually wear off and soon he would be again as he was before. Paul was never again the same, nor was Paul insane. What happened on the Damascus road can be understood only in the light of its consequences. Thus far we have tried to understand Paul, the educated Jew, the opponent of the followers of the Way. From now on, we deal with a different Paul, a changed man and a man who could change others. The power that had changed him was the power that he called upon now to enable him to move across the world and spread the light that had come to him. Paul had been conquered by the man he set out to defeat. Forever after he was to be the servant of Jesus. No more important event has ever occurred in history than this coming of the light to Paul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Discuss why Paul's efforts to be "right with God" were doomed to failure.

2. Compare the death of Christian martyrs like Stephen to that of one who dies for some other cause. What is unique in the Christian's death?

3. Do you think we need more Christian martyrs today? Would there be more martyrs if more of us were really Christian? If so, where and how?

4. Is a conversion experience like that of Paul understood by most religious people today? Is some form of conversion essential to a deep Christian faith? Why, or why not?

5. Do you think Jesus is more important to us as a "living spirit," or as an example for us to follow?

6. Why might Paul's experience on the Damascus Road be considered the most important event in history?

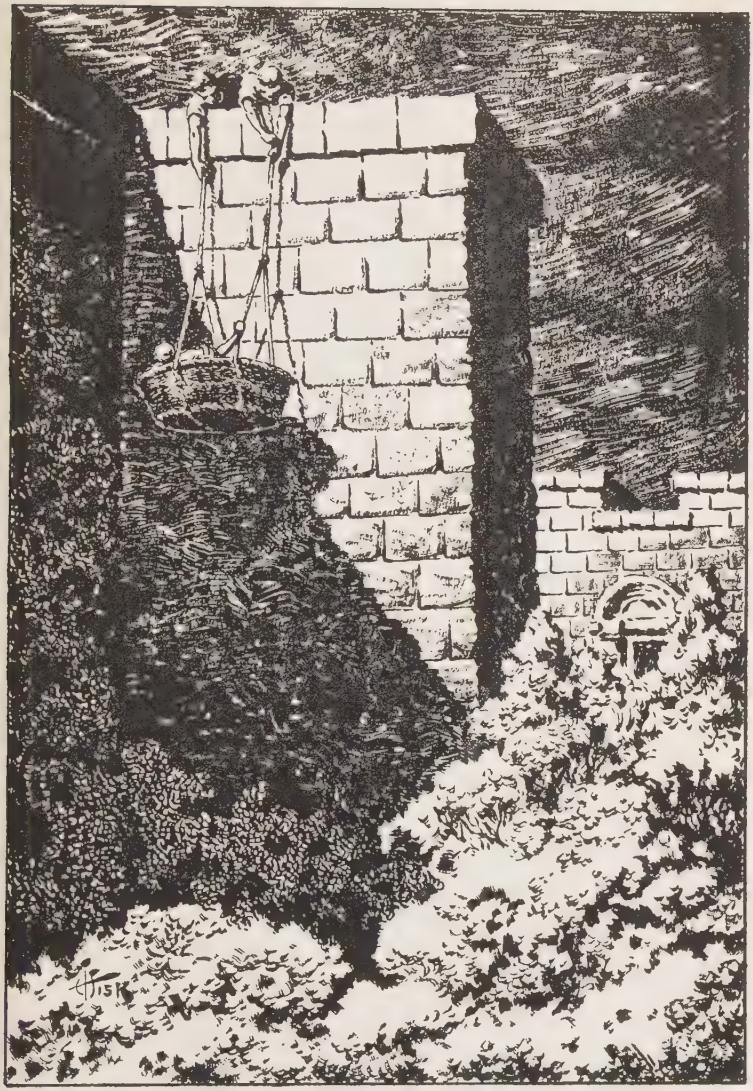
Traveler and Tentmaker

Galatians 1:15–24 and Acts 13:1–4

SAUL, the Jew, has become Paul, the Christian. After his experience on the Damascus road Paul needed time to reflect on its meaning. He knew that he must walk in the light that had been given him, but the change in his thinking and living was to be so complete that it could not be fully comprehended in a day. Above all else, he must reconsider all that he had formerly believed, in the light of Jesus Christ who was now the Lord of his life. He went, therefore, into Arabia, which is largely desert country. There for many months he thought and planned. During long days of meditation he probably worked out many of the great themes of his preaching and writing—the foundation stones of the great faith by which he lived. We will be dealing with those great themes of faith later, as we consider the meaning of Paul's message for us today. But now we want to follow him as closely as we can, as he moves on toward the task which he is to assume as his own: the task of spreading the news of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

A Traitor in Damascus

When he had finished his time of retirement in Arabia, he returned to Damascus where he had been taken in an almost helpless state after his great experience. So the man who had formerly



Paul, helped by his friends, was taken secretly to a room in the city wall itself and, under cover of darkness, was lowered over the wall in a great basket.

planned to hunt out and persecute the Christians in the city now came to aid them in their work. How the news of this amazing change must have spread through the town! Paul became a marked man, both among his former companions—the Jews, and his present co-workers—the Christians. The Jews regarded him as a turncoat and a particularly dangerous one, for he was able to bring all the power and skill of his finely trained mind to the defense of the faith which he had once attacked. His new comrades welcomed him with joy and deep respect, for no one could doubt his intense sincerity. They were convinced that God had chosen him for the task of preaching Christ. They had heard how Christ appeared to him in a vision, the effects of which had been to leave him blind and helpless. But he was not blind nor helpless now. So powerful was the effect of his preaching that the hostile Jews decided to kill him. Their best opportunity would be to seize him when he sought to escape from the city, as he soon must try to do, for he could no longer be safe in Damascus. They watched the gates by which he must make his exit but, helped by friends, he was taken secretly to a room in the city wall itself and, under cover of darkness, was lowered over the wall in a great basket. There was danger in the moment of escape and danger on the roads afterward, but Paul was able to evade his pursuers and get safely to Jerusalem.

Peter and Paul

In Jerusalem Paul was received with some suspicion. Those who had suffered because of his work before were not sure they could trust him now. Finally, however, Barnabas became friendly with him, took him to Peter and to James, the brother of Jesus, and then introduced him to the whole Christian group. Thus Paul soon was able to gain their confidence.

Peter, you will remember, was the big fisherman who had been Jesus' constant companion, except in those last dark hours of

Jesus' life when Peter denied that he knew him. Those hours of cowardice were passed now, and Peter had become the bold leader of the believers in Jerusalem. He and Paul spent many days together—the disciple who had betrayed his Master and the man who had persecuted the followers of Jesus. From Peter, Paul learned the full story of Jesus' life and teachings—a story he was never to forget, and the story he was to tell to thousands. It is interesting to picture these two together. Paul was an educated man and Peter was not. We imagine Peter as a big man with hands roughened by a life of toil. Paul was probably not large, a thin, intense man troubled by much illness but never allowing it to defeat him. In all his life he was to know little rest, except when he was in prison. He was to travel constantly, risking his life on land and sea, and suffering stonings and floggings and mob attacks again and again. Peter knew from experience that it was dangerous to speak about Jesus in Jerusalem, and Paul faced the dangerous future with his eyes wide open. After their days together, Paul returned to his own city of Tarsus.

Paul had originally chosen for himself a career as a teacher of his people, a rabbi. He knew he would have to have a trade, as rabbis were not expected to take money from those they taught. Paul had learned how to make tents and was able to work at this trade wherever he went. We know Paul best as a traveler, but he was also a tentmaker. He traveled, not that he might pursue his trade, but in order that he might fulfill his calling to be a preacher of "the good news of God," which is what we call the gospel. Though he himself had been born a Jew, and though all of the men and women who so far had been won to the new Way of discipleship were Jews, Paul decided to take the message about Jesus Christ to those whom the Jews called Gentiles: Greeks and Romans, inhabitants of all the provinces and cities of the Roman Empire. We know that Paul was especially qualified to do this, for he understood something of Greek philos-

ophy, he knew about the various religions of these people, and he possessed that great benefit for the traveler—Roman citizenship.

Preaching to the Gentiles

Already, in small ways, the work of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles had begun. The Jews who were so hostile to Christianity were responsible for this, since their fierce persecution caused many followers of Jesus to leave Jerusalem for fear of death or imprisonment. They fled in all directions and settled in places like the island of Cyprus and the city of Antioch. There they were joined by Greek-speaking Jews who promptly began to spread the message to the Greeks in these places. These Greeks were not without a religion, for many of them took part in the rites of the mystery religions, and some had accepted the teachings of the religious philosophers: the Stoics and the Epicureans. Paul was to say later to people like these that their trouble was they were *too* religious. They worshiped many gods, but did not know the one true God. Judaism had sternly insisted that there is but one God and that he makes unmistakable moral demands of his followers. This monotheism and the moral rigor of the Jews appealed to many Greeks and, without becoming Jews themselves, they often became "hearers." That is, they listened to the words of the Jewish faith without taking part in its life and worship. This was about all they could do, for Judaism was an exclusive religion in many ways, and it was not easy for an outsider to become a member of this religious community with its racial and national aspects. These hearers, however, were well prepared for the preaching of Christianity which, though based upon Judaism, rejected the exclusive elements of Judaism and welcomed adherents from all races and nations. So in Christianity they found a religion no less uncompromising than Judaism in its insistence upon the reality of a single God who was Lord

of all creation, a God whom men must worship not with their lips alone, but also with their lives. The great new element in Christianity, as Paul had discovered, was the person of Jesus Christ. By means of his teachings, his life and his death, men knew that the God who had seemed a stern and righteous judge demanding exact fulfillment of his commandments, was truly a loving Father, pitying his children in their weakness and giving them new strength and new hope to live in fellowship with him and with their neighbors. This was the message that was being proclaimed in Antioch, and when the leaders in Jerusalem heard that Greeks were responding to the gospel, they sent Barnabas to help in the work. When he had arrived and begun his work he found so great a response that he knew he must have a helper. He thought at once of Paul, whom he had known in Jerusalem, and went off to Tarsus to enlist him in this work. Paul had now been in Tarsus for perhaps ten years, working at his trade and preaching among his former friends who now were bitter enemies. He accepted gladly the invitation of Barnabas, and returned with him to Antioch.

Tentmaker and Church-Builder

Antioch was one of the three greatest cities of the Empire—only Rome and Alexandria were greater—and it was known far and wide for its beauty and for its low moral standards. Paul and Barnabas worked there for a year. It was in Antioch that the term Christian was first used to describe the followers of Jesus. It was a term of contempt, used much as some college students employ the word "Christers" to describe classmates who are active in a church or Christian Association.

We are now going to follow Paul in some of his travels and find how proudly he took the name of Christ, accepting with fierce joy all the danger and contempt that went with it, and finding full use for all his great powers of mind and spirit. As a tent-

maker he continued to practice his trade, for he wanted no one to say of him that he served Christ for money. But Paul, in the days and years of his labors for Christ in the cities of a pagan Empire, was fashioning not tents for the soldiers of Caesar, but a place of habitation for the Christians of all ages, for Paul, above all else, was the builder of the Christian Church.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Did Jesus, at any time of his life, go into the desert alone, as Paul went into Arabia? If so, when and why?

2. Do you think that those who have positions of leadership in the church today should earn their wages, as Paul did, by some form of physical labor?

3. What were the "mystery religions" referred to in this chapter?

4. Would Paul and Barnabas have been the only champions of a new religion in Antioch, or do you think there were others?

5. What important beliefs did Christianity, as Paul preached it, have in common with Judaism?

Called to Be an Apostle

2 Corinthians 11:16–31

ALL OF THE LETTERS written by Paul alone and preserved in our New Testament begin in the same way. The Letter to the Romans, which is the longest and most carefully written of all, can be taken as an example of this characteristic introduction:

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle . . ." (Romans 1: 1) [1]

The only letter which does not begin with a reference to his "call" to the role of apostle is the brief personal letter to Philemon. Here, Paul is not faced with the necessity of presenting his credentials to a church, and therefore he makes his greeting more personal. But when he is writing to the churches he always speaks in the first sentence of what must have been the most important fact about him. He was "called to be an apostle."

Who Is an Apostle?

We say that he was presenting his credentials, and that is a fair statement. True, he knew many of the persons who would be reading the letter or hearing it read. For those, his words would come as a reminder of who and what he was. Sometimes he

[1] From *The Bible: A New Translation* by James Moffatt. Copyright 1935 by Harper and Brothers. Used by permission.

felt they needed that reminder, for he had heard that others were speaking against him and seeking to destroy his work. For the new converts who had come into the Christian fellowship after Paul had left, these words were an evidence of Paul's right to speak firmly and with authority. An apostle, you see, was one who could speak with authority because he had been with Jesus. An apostle was one whom Jesus himself had chosen. It was a tragic fact that one of the original twelve disciples had betrayed his Master and had passed from the scene. The name of Judas was already becoming a synonym for treachery. But the rest of the disciples were naturally regarded with the greatest respect. In these early days there were no written records of Jesus' teachings. No one had yet tried to put on paper the story of his life. That did not seem necessary, for eyewitnesses could tell all about the great events of Jesus' brief ministry. And of course none could tell the story better than Jesus' own disciples. These were the apostles. The brother of Jesus, whose name was James, was also given honor in Jerusalem, for the Jews placed great emphasis upon family ties and were inclined to think of the brother of a departed leader as in some sense the inheritor of his unfinished task.

Paul could not claim to be an apostle in this primary sense. He had not even laid eyes on Jesus during his earthly life. Moreover, he had been a persecutor of those who had known Jesus and were loyal to him. Many must have said of him, "Why should we listen to him? He is no apostle. He has come late and by the back door into our company. First let him prove his right to speak with authority and to be heard with respect." These words would come most naturally from those who felt that membership in the fellowship of the Way should be confined to those who were good Jews or were willing to become Jews. For they were jealous of Paul's influence with Greeks who were, because of him, becoming dominant in the Christian body.

Knowing Jesus

To all who challenged his right to leadership and to all who did not yet understand fully what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus, Paul cried, "I am an apostle. I am a disciple, called by Christ." This was, as we have said, the most important fact in his life. Paul could never forget the Damascus Road climax to his experience of conversion. He had seen Jesus. Let no man challenge this, for the absolute change in Paul's life was proof enough that Jesus had come to him and called him, as he had called the fishermen by the Sea of Galilee. From that moment onward, Paul's whole life had been given to Christ and to his gospel. It was important—not only for Paul, but also for all those to whom he preached—that the great truth be known, the truth that Jesus Christ can and does come into the life of one who has never known him "in the flesh." We use these strange expressions because there are no words that really describe the tremendous fact with which we are dealing. Paul is an apostle because the one who had conquered death has come to him, freed him from a living death, and brought him into this life of discipleship.

To be an apostle to the Gentiles, as Paul knew himself to be, meant to speak always to people who had never known Jesus—people who were wholly unacquainted with the circumstances of his life, the work he had done, and the truths he had taught. Paul felt it to be his task to tell them all that could be told about Jesus, and he himself had talked long with Peter who had known Jesus best. But surely it would be a hopeless situation if he must say to these Greeks that they could never really know Jesus and have fellowship with him, because they had lived in a different country and were of a different race and religion. Now Paul could assure them that Jesus was alive, not dead, that he had burst all the bonds that might be expected to hold an ordinary person—not only death itself, but also those very real chains of

race and religion. He could share with them the great news that one did not need to have seen Jesus in Palestine to know him now. Every fiber in Paul's body tingled in affirmation of this fact. He had come to know Christ so intimately that he wrote, ". . . It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." [1] We must not regard such statements as a kind of polite exaggeration or as the words of a man who was queer. Paul was putting forever out of Christianity the idea that our religion is a matter of serving a memory and trying to keep alive the distant and dimming picture of a man who once lived. Perhaps Paul was no more certain than we are as to just what Jesus looked like. But he knew him, and Paul's life was proof of his knowledge.

The Constant Companion

Paul had different companions in his travels. One of them was Luke, the physician, who wrote both the Gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts, which is the first Christian history. There were others: Barnabas, Timothy, Silvanus. Paul mentions their names and speaks of others who shared with him the work of preaching and building and guiding. These men come and go and sometimes Paul is accompanied by none of them. But he is never alone, for his constant companion is Jesus, who has called him into fellowship with him in the preaching of his gospel. Jesus was with him when he was stoned and flogged and shipwrecked. When Paul stood before the Roman officials he remembered that Jesus had stood before Pilate, and he knew that Jesus was standing with him. When Paul encountered the jealousy, suspicion, and violent hostility of the Jewish leaders he knew that Jesus had suffered at the hands of the High Priests and Pharisees. In the hour of his death (about which we know little

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[1] Galatians 2: 20a. From *The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament,* copyrighted 1946 by the International Council of Religious Education, and used by permission.

but can guess that it was in Rome and at the hands of Roman officers) Paul would surely know that Jesus stood with him. Had he not seen Jesus? Had he not been with him? In every waking moment he saw Jesus before him, leading him on.

Friend and Lord

Paul did not consider himself to be equal to Jesus. Jesus was his Lord. Paul would say that we are badly mistaken if we assume that we can have companionship only with our equals. The greatest friendship of all is with one who is far above us in every way, yet is beside us, encouraging us, and understanding us better than anyone else when we fail. Jesus calls us not servants but friends, for he shares everything with us. Yet because we are made his friends, our service becomes an even more important part of our life with him. We do all that he had commanded us to do, not because he can force us to do these things, but only because those who are his friends want to be like him. There is only one way to be like him, and that is to care as much as he did for all men. Paul had learned this. Whatever his enemies might say about him, they could not deny that he was possessed by one desire—to tell everyone about Jesus and share with them the great joy of being his friend.

When this great apostle began his mission to the Greeks he said that he had seen in a dream a man of Macedonia who cried, "Come over and help us." Paul could not resist that plea. He saw a whole world in need of Jesus Christ. He knew how much he himself had needed this great companion, and he believed that all men were equally in need of him. Somehow Paul had received from Jesus, more surely than any of the disciples, the Master's own burning concern for people in need of love and encouragement. He was, as he believed himself to be, the true apostle, called by Jesus into his service. When he spoke of Jesus, men knew he spoke of one living.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Do you remember how the twelve disciples came into fellowship with Jesus? How were they called?

2. Paul felt that he had particular assets for his work with non-Jewish people. Remembering his early life and training, can you say what these assets would be?

3. Are any of the portraits we have of Jesus known to be accurate? Do we have anywhere in the Gospels a description of Jesus' physical appearance?

4. How much is known about the disciples after the night when they all fled, as Jesus was being tried before Pilate? Where do we turn in the Bible to find their story?

5. Paul was not the first to see Jesus after the crucifixion. Can you name some who saw him before Paul did? According to the Gospels, to whom did Jesus first appear?

6. Do you think Paul is less to be relied upon than Peter as an interpreter of the teachings of Jesus? Why, or why not?

With My Own Hand

The Epistle to Philemon

PAUL wrote his letters not for posterity, but for the Christians of his own day—for the encouragement of the Christian churches he had started and then left in the care of local leadership. We have his letters as part of our New Testament only because the people in those churches received so much help from them that they did not like to see the letters destroyed. So they were kept in boxes along with other treasured articles belonging to the churches. The letters were written on the papyrus rolls which were the customary stationery of those days. Fortunately, these rolls were extremely durable. Many government documents and even private letters of that day have been found intact in recent years, and they are a great help in the task of reconstructing an accurate picture of the life of that era. They also help us to understand some of the expressions in Paul's letters, and to know what his letters looked like, even though none of them have actually survived to our own day.

The Letters of Paul

As we know when we look at them in the New Testament, some of Paul's letters were quite long: the Letter to the Romans, for example. Others are briefer, but only one of them is as short as a personal letter which we would write today. That is the

letter Paul wrote to Philemon, asking him to treat kindly his runaway slave, Onesimus. Some of the letters in the New Testament are really not single letters, but several which have been put together. Some of the most interesting—and puzzling—problems of the scholars have to do with this fact that later generations preserved as one letter parts of several letters written at different times to the same church. First and Second Corinthians are examples of such letters. They are really four letters written to the Corinthians, later combined into two.

Did Paul sit down and write these letters himself? If you will read carefully a few of his letters you will see very soon the proof that he had some secretarial help. For at the close of several of his letters he says, "This I write in my own hand." This indicates that most of the letter was written by a stenographer, but that Paul himself wrote a few words of personal greeting in his own handwriting so that his friends will feel a bit closer to him. Various persons probably served him as stenographer. The churches he had founded, recognizing how hard he worked when he was with them (and remember that Paul worked at his trade of tentmaking as well as preaching and organizing the churches) would supply him with someone to take down his letters. We can imagine Paul and his stenographer hard at work, perhaps in the late afternoon or evening, with Paul calling before his mind's eye all the friends in another city who have helped him, and for whose faith and steadfastness he is so deeply concerned.

Remember that in those days communication was very slow. Letters could reach their destination only as quickly as a messenger could carry them. Roman couriers were constantly traveling throughout the Empire bearing important documents: instructions to provincial governors, notices of court proceedings, and other information. These couriers were undoubtedly given priority on transportation and were able to move most swiftly. The letters of Paul would have to travel more slowly. Often they

Roman couriers traveled throughout the Empire, but Paul sent his letters by journeying friends.

were entrusted to one who had accompanied Paul on part of his journey—perhaps a person from the church to which the letter was going. Then in the letter Paul would speak some commending word about the bearer of the letter, and we can be sure that this particular letter would travel a bit more quickly, borne by one who was heading for home after a long absence.

Good News—and Bad

Paul's letters had to travel slowly, but often the news from the churches was even more slow in reaching him. We can imagine his thoughts: What had happened to the little group since he had left? Had they held together? Had they been able to withstand the scorn and persecution of their neighbors? Had they kept the faith pure and strong, as they had received it? Were they giving a demonstration of Christian living which would prove to the world that Jesus Christ was Lord of their lives? All these questions were in Paul's mind as he waited for news from a city he had left. Sometimes Paul would write a letter during one of these periods of anxious waiting. Then, while he was writing, news would come and Paul, if it were good news, would pour out his heart in gratitude to God, and in affection for his friends who had not let him down and had been true to their Master. In the case of one of the earliest of Paul's letters, written to the church in Thessalonica, Paul had been waiting anxiously in Corinth for word from the churches in Macedonia, where he had for the first time carried the gospel to wholly Greek cities. When the two messengers, Silvanus and Timothy, arrived and told Paul that the churches had survived and grown since his departure, he began his letter to the Thessalonians with a burst of enthusiasm for their faith. "We always thank God for you all . . ." and later ". . . the word of the Lord has resounded from you not only through Macedonia and Achaia—no, your faith in God has reached every place." (1 Thessalonians 1: 2

and 8) [1] Such good reports gave Paul great joy and renewed his courage and his faith.

But Paul received bad news as well as good concerning the churches he had established. When bad news came he dealt with it in a letter. There was nothing timid about Paul. His letters are great because he never minced words, and men knew that he would not hesitate to say to their faces what he put on the papyrus roll. Paul heard at Antioch about what was happening in the churches of Galatia. There about A.D. 47 he had founded several churches; in 51 and 52 he received reports that others were seeking to undo what he had done. Paul, you remember, had once lived in bondage to the Jewish Law and its requirements, but now had found the freedom of faith in Christ. He wanted all Christians to find that same freedom and he could see no reason to force non-Jewish converts to submit to the requirements of the Jewish ceremonial laws. But some Jewish Christians insisted that Paul was a traitor to Judaism. They believed that Jesus had simply been the fulfillment or climax of the Jewish Law, and that one could not benefit from his life and teachings without accepting and obeying all the Law. We have seen how strongly Paul resisted the charge that he was not a true apostle simply because he had never known Jesus during his lifetime. Here was a double thrust at his claim to be an apostle. These men, working in the churches of Galatia, were telling the people that Paul was not a true apostle both because he had never been one of the Twelve, and because he had given up his Judaism and was encouraging others to do the same.

The Brand of Jesus

We are going to look more closely at the Letter to the Galatians later, but it would be well to scan its pages now to see what

[1] From *The Bible: A New Translation* by James Moffatt. Copyright 1935 by Harper and Brothers. Used by permission.

Paul can do when his feelings are aroused. His anger at the false teachers who have led the Galatians astray is almost equalled by his sorrow at the way in which the Galatians have allowed themselves to be called away from the true faith. Paul cries, "O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you . . . ?" (Galatians 3: 1) [2] It is a strong, passionate letter. Paul ends it in his own handwriting and says, "See what big letters I make when I write you in my own hand!" (Galatians 6: 11) [2] and at the close says solemnly, "Let no one interfere with me after this, for I bear branded on my body the owner's stamp of the Lord Jesus." (6: 17) [2]

These closing words are strange indeed. What did Paul mean? We can understand the exclamation about the letters written in his own hand. There is something very human about it. Apparently he is calling attention to the fact that he writes large because he is so excited and so concerned about them. They must not be misled by the neat and precise letters of the stenographer—*he* is not worked up about this, but Paul *is*. Paul has labored with them and suffered with them, has even been beaten and left for dead on the road. Yes, he says, I am branded with the mark which shows that I belong to Jesus. I have given myself as a slave to him. Of course Paul did not mean that literally. He knew the great difference between slavery and freedom, and he knew he was free because of his faith. Yet, in order to make his loyalty to Jesus unmistakably clear, he uses this vivid expression. And what an appropriate one it is! Here is no polite diplomat writing official messages to those whom he governs. Nor is this just an old friend greeting those with whom he has spent happy days. Paul is a man under orders writing to those who are under the same orders: soldiers of Christ—yes, even slaves of Jesus, who bear on their bodies the brand of his ownership. This is what it

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really means to be a Christian. The letters of Paul help us to remember that. Paul did not write them for us, but we can read them as though he did, for we, too, belong to Christ.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. In what language were the letters of Paul written? How did it compare with that used by Jesus? With that used by the great philosophers and dramatists of ancient Greece?

2. Would you be likely to write long or short letters if every letter you wrote had to be carried by a man traveling by foot, on horseback, or on a boat to its destination?

3. Can you think of anyone besides Paul who was a great letter-writer and whose letters are preserved to this day?

4. Imagine that Paul was writing a letter to the Christians at _____ (fill in the name of your town). What would he have to say about you, after having paid you a visit and then gone on?

5. Perhaps we do not share Paul's enthusiasm for belonging wholly to Christ. We want to belong only to ourselves. Does anyone remain free from bondage to someone or something? What are some of the things by which people in our time are enslaved?

To Live by Faith

Romans 1:14–25 and 7:19–25

We must now seek to understand what Paul meant by faith. But first we must resolve that we will give Paul the honor that he did not always receive from those with whom he worked and to whom he wrote his letters. We are going to believe that he really means what he says, that he is not saying anything merely in the hope of winning favor with us or persuading us to believe him out of sympathy for him. Paul had to deal often with that kind of thinking, and he always saw it for what it was—a form of evasion of the truth. He did not try to hide the fact that his own experiences had made a difference in his understanding of faith, but he would never be content to leave the matter there. He is talking to you about what is just as true for you as it is for him. That is because in reality he is talking not about himself or us *as we are,* but about all of us as God *meant us to be.* What that is we can understand only as we know Christ.

What Is Faith?

Paul said that faith is belief, not in our own righteousness, but in the goodness of God. And how can we be sure of the goodness of God? Because we know that God has given his own Son, Jesus Christ, for us. The two great truths that are driven home to our hearts as we learn that Jesus died for us are these: We are not

worthy of his death, but God treated us as though we were. God's love and our unworthiness are the two basic themes of Paul's continuing discussion of faith and its consequences in all of his letters. We cannot really know God as he is and ourselves as we are until we begin to believe in Christ as God's Son and our Savior.

We are in deep waters now. The matters Paul deals with are of such importance that we cannot discuss them without constantly realizing that these things affect life at its very center. Paul is concerned, not with the outward events of our lives, but with our inner motives and attitudes. He cuts through men's defenses and gets down to those secret realms of commitment where the acts of a man are determined. What makes us do the things that we do? Why are we trying always to impress others, to win favor, or just to win? Paul looked at his own motives and answered that every man is seeking to justify himself before his fellows and before God. He is trying to prove that he is worthy of respect and honor—but more than that, of love.

Success and Failure

We do not have to agree with Paul. Perhaps he was wrong. But at least we ought to make an honest effort to understand what he is trying to say. This seems to be his idea. We all try to win when we compete in a race. We would hardly be living if we were not trying to excel in something. If we cannot get the best grades in school, we can perhaps play football, or dance, or play the cornet, or make dresses, or sell magazines better than others. It is not easy to admit, as we may have to do, that there is not a single thing that we can do better than someone else. It isn't easy to love those who do it better than we do. When we lose again and again, we may begin to feel hurt and wonder if anyone loves us.

Look at it from the other side. Perhaps we do usually win. We

may get high grades in school, and in many other activities excel our friends. As we go on to win again and again, it is natural to think rather well of ourselves and to think that everyone else must think well of us, too. We find it hard to realize that many others do not like us simply because we have been so successful.

Paul saw very clearly the meaning of both of these experiences. He saw that we are all so constituted that we are easily led to put our trust in ourselves. That is, we tend to expect rewards or punishments according to how well we perform. But that isn't the whole of Paul's insight. He thought deeply about this whole problem of rewards and punishments. Why do we fear that we will not be loved if we fail to win the game? And why do we assume that everyone will like us because we are winning? As a matter of fact, our experiences are often quite contrary to these expectations. Those who really care for us do not waver in their affection because we fail; and, on the other hand, our success does not win us many true friends, though it may bring us admirers whose admiration lasts just about as long as our victories. Nevertheless, we continue to be very anxious about this whole matter of success and failure.

Trying to Please God

Paul went another step in his thinking when he said that we are concerned not only about what others will think of us. Even though we may not realize it, we are very much concerned about what God will think of us. No matter how we explain it, all of us have a sense of responsibility to God. We all have a deep conviction that there is a divine standard to which we must measure up. We are not often fully conscious of the demands of this standard upon us; and we seldom mention the matter. We speak of conscience or ideals or pride. Yet all the time, our efforts are really directed to the end of satisfying this mysterious impulse to obey the voice of God.

In the early beginnings of their worship of God, men sought to placate and appease him. They recognized that they were not meeting his demands and they hoped that his anger would be lessened if they gave him gifts and made sacrifices before him. But men of greater understanding spoke against these practices. They pointed out that God expects obedience of us, and that he is not going to be satisfied with anything less than obedience. He wants, not our sacrifices, but our service. We must do what he commands.

Paul agrees with this kind of religion. God does make demands upon us and we ought to fulfill them. But there are two dangers here. First, we may decide that if we do all those things which we believe God demands of us, he ought therefore to love us without question. We would have a certain claim upon him. In the second place, we may soon discover that we are unable to do what God requires. Then, we will either give up in despair, or convince ourselves that the requirements of God are not really as important as we thought.

Our Human Dilemma

At this point we may find Paul most difficult to follow, yet it is important that we do follow him in his thinking here. He insists that God demands of us a kind of living far superior to that which is demanded by our friends or by society as a whole. For instance, we are to care just as much about what happens to others as about what happens to ourselves. We are to be absolutely fair and honest in our dealings. We are not to spread gossip, to be jealous or envious; we are not to make use of others for our own ends. All these things we must do, not to satisfy ourselves, but to fulfill the commandments of God. Paul knew those commandments as they had been honored for centuries among his own people. We know them as the Ten Commandments. The first of them is that we must love God.

Yes, said Paul, we must love God—but that does not mean that God must love us. He has a right to demand all these things of us simply because he created us. He can even demand that we love him. But we have no right to demand that he should love us. Who are we to tell him what to do? He is God and we are only men. If we should begin to think that we could win his love by perfect obedience to his commands, would we be any better off than before? The more fully we understand what he requires of us, the more certain we become that we cannot wholly please him. The more we love God and seek to do his will, the more aware we become of our failures. Whether we admit at the outset that we have no claim on God's love, or whether we come to that admission through our experience of failure in living up to his laws for our living, the important fact is that we do arrive at that unhappy conclusion. Paul is not at all encouraging at this point. We are up against a stone wall. We know that God puts demands upon us. We know that we must love him and demonstrate that love by fulfilling his commandments. But we cannot do it. What, then, shall we do?

The Answer of Faith

Paul's answer will never satisfy anyone who has not reached the same conclusion that he has reached concerning all attempts to win the approval of God by striving to obey his commandments. The answer may seem shocking to us. For Paul says just this: We are to do nothing. We are to stop trying to make everything right by our own effort, and are to believe that God has done something for us that changes the whole picture. This is what Paul means by faith. It is complete trust in what God has made clear to us through Jesus Christ.

In Jesus Christ—in his life, his teachings, and his death upon the cross—we see that God *does* love us, not for what we have done or are going to do, not because we succeed in living up to

his commandments, but just because he is a God of love. You see how the whole picture really is changed. Instead of our trying to win God's love by doing the things he commands us to do, we are rather in the position of doing all that he asks *because* he loves us. We are freed now from the temptation to scale down his demands or to evade them by offering sacrifices, for we know that he has made it possible for us to do all that he asks by sacrificing *himself* for us in the person of Jesus Christ. For when we have faith, Paul says, we know that Jesus who was put to death on Calvary was truly God giving himself for us, that we might know both his boundless love for us and his suffering for our sins.

Faith leads us entirely out of the realm of concern for ourselves and the rewards or punishments that our actions will merit. When we believe in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we know once and for all that God loves us and can ask anything he desires of us, because all that he asks he enables us to do. But we also know that we cannot hope to serve him unless we first acknowledge his love and accept it, not as something we deserve, but as a gift which makes a good life possible.

Trust and Surrender

You may say that we are in a more fortunate position than Paul was. We have always known that God first loved us and gave himself for us. We have not had to learn by hard experience, as Paul did, that we cannot ever measure up to the standards God sets for us, as long as we depend upon our own strength. There is much truth in that. We owe more than we can ever repay to all those who, beginning with Paul, have preached this good news to us. Yet we know, from our own experience, how easy it is to forget or to ignore the gospel.

We have been considering life and death problems here, and yet we know how seldom we really admit that God alone can give us the answer to the questions we have been asking. Paul's

great gift to us is, first, his assurance that these questions confront us because God is real and cannot be evaded. Paul, in the second place, never wavers in his belief that God, who confronts us with his demands and allows us no peace until we have faced them, also can enable us to do what he requires. Faith is trust in him who is the source of all our desire to live better lives—more loving, more honest, more just. Faith is trust in him who has given us the power to answer his call. Faith is our surrender to God, so that we begin to depend, not on what we can do by ourselves, but on what he will do, working in us. This faith can be ours because we see him whom we trust in Jesus Christ.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Why do we often resent those who are always successful? Is it because they are tactless in their winning—or is it because the very fact of their winning emphasizes our failure to win?

2. Think of the persons you care most about and feel closest to. Is it true that their friendship does not depend on your success or popularity?

3. Do you agree that God has a right to claim obedience from us? Why, or why not?

4. If we obey God, ought we to be able to claim his love as our right? Why, or why not?

5. Do you think Paul put too much emphasis on the love of God as something quite different from the law of God? How much influence did his early training and his conversion experience have on his thinking at this point?

6. If you were asked to tell what faith means to you, what would you answer?

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Our Lord Jesus Christ

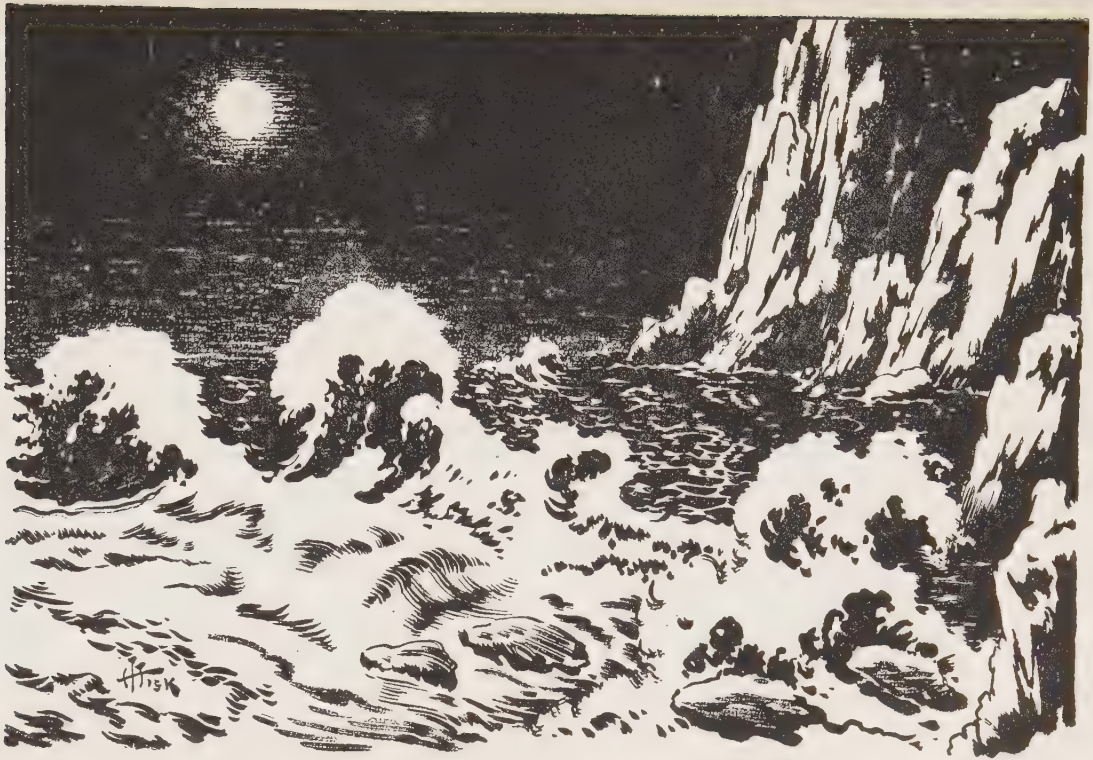
1 Corinthians 2:1–16

PAUL was a very religious man before he became a Christian. As a Jew and a Pharisee, he knew a great deal about God. But he never tires of saying to us that he really did not know God at all until he came into contact with Jesus Christ. It is one thing, Paul insists, to know *about* God; it is quite a different thing to *know* God. In Jesus Christ we come to know God as he really is. So sure was Paul of this fact that, though he was educated and able to debate with Jews and Greeks about the philosopher's and scientist's ideas of God, he was determined to speak only of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. If we can understand even a part of what he meant by those words, we will know far better what Christianity means than if we were to read a dozen very learned and difficult books. But because so much is packed into Paul's teachings, they are neither simple nor easy. Much that Paul has to say, as he well knew, is not only startling, but even offensive to us. Just as it bothers us to learn from him that we are only fooling ourselves if we think we can live up to the commandments of God, so also it offends our pride to hear that our wisdom will be no help to us in gaining a true knowledge of God. We can think about God as much as we please, but we only know him through what he does in taking us by the hand and leading us.

Man and Nature

If we will think for a while with Paul, we shall see the truth in what he says. There are many things in our world which can give us some inkling of a mighty power at work. The more we find out about the universe in which we live, the more wonderful it seems. The greatest scientists of our day are awed by the majesty of creation. We, who know so much less than they, can still sense the greatness of the creative power that has brought this awesome universe into being. But all that the universe tells us is that this power is mighty; it does not tell us that it is good or that it cares in any way for us. But why should it, we may ask? Would it not be rather petty and selfish of us even to expect any concern for us as persons on the part of this great creative power? Perhaps, on the face of it, there is something strange about our yearning for a personal relationship to that power. But as we think about that desire, which is very real in all of us, we may begin to realize that there is a very good reason for it. After all, we are part of this universe. If the stars and the oceans and the mountains were created, so were we. Whatever their beauty and majesty be, they lack the one thing that we possess—hearts that love and are joyful or sad, minds that can reach out in thought through space and time, and spirits that aspire and are moved by grandeur and goodness. Here, of course, we are using words that are not adequate, but the experiences behind them are very real for all of us. When we look up into the sky at night and see the thousands of far-off stars, it is we and not they that are able to think solemn thoughts of life and death and love and loneliness. Then why should we not hope and believe that the power that brought into being this mighty universe, *and* our minds and souls and spirits, cares for us, too?

Paul does not say just that we can hope this; he says we can



We see God's creative power in the beauty and majesty of the mountains, the sea, and the stars; but only in Jesus do we have proof of God's love for us.

know it and be absolutely certain of it. But not by looking at the stars; not even by looking into our own hearts and consciences. We know it by looking at Jesus. And Paul never speaks simply of Jesus; he always speaks about Jesus Christ our Lord. We will have to understand what he means by these words, and then we will know why he believes that God is revealed in Christ. As we begin, let us remember this: Paul is always saying that the God we must come to know is not the God of nature or of moral laws or even a God discovered by means of the best use of our human wisdom. The God we know must be the God who loves us and cares for us as individuals, our heavenly Father whom we love because we know what he has done for us. In the end, we come to see that he is the God of nature and of moral laws, the God whom the philosophers seek and only partially discover. But Christianity, let us never forget, is God's coming to us in such a way that we cannot mistake him, and in knowing him we must love him.

God in Christ

God comes to us, in this unmistakable way, in Jesus whom his followers called the Christ. When we say "Jesus Christ," we are saying exactly what Paul said about Jesus. We ought not to use those words lightly, for they form the most important assertion that man has ever made about himself and God. When we speak of Jesus as the Christ, we are saying that Jesus of Nazareth was a man in whom God dwelt. Think for a moment what that means. Having looked out into this vast universe, having learned something of the history of mankind, and knowing a little about our own rather complex selves, we turn to one man who lived in this world less than thirty-five years and say that God, who created the universe and man, came into the world in that man. We do not say that he had a little more of the divine in him than we do, or that for a while some superstitious

people thought he was God. We say with Paul and all the early Christians, and the Church throughout history, that Jesus is the Christ, God incarnate.

"The Lord Is My Shepherd"

To say that Jesus is the Christ is to say that in him we see who God is. Christianity, Paul tells us, is not the statement that God is love—or any other statement. Christianity is the *faith* that God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. Much that Jesus teaches us about God is really God teaching us, or rather telling us, about himself. Yet—and this is important—Jesus is a man, and therefore many of his teachings are those of a man who could be mistaken. It would be much easier for us if the Christian faith were more logical and clear. We often try to make it so, but Paul insists that God has chosen his own way of telling us about himself, and if we are to hear him we must not try to alter the message to suit ourselves.

In Christ—in the man Jesus in whom God dwelt—we see that God cares so much about us that he will not just try to educate us or lead us in the right way in life by disciplining us. He cares so much about what happens to us that he will come to us himself and lead us with him along the way. You remember Jesus' own parable of the shepherd who went after the missing sheep. It is a beautiful story, and we think of Jesus telling it as an illustration of God's love. This is true, but it is not all. Paul saw Jesus as that shepherd God. God is in Jesus Christ, seeking men and women and children who have not understood his love and cannot therefore respond to it. As we look at Jesus, we know God. We know him because he has come to us as a man.

Does God Suffer?

Paul teaches that we know who God *is* as we look at Jesus the Christ, but, more important than that, we know what God *does*.

God not only teaches us the truth about himself and leads us along the right way in life, but he even gives himself for us. Neither Paul nor any of the other Christians in the early years could ever forget that Jesus Christ died a terrible death of suffering upon a cross. That cross was at the center of their thought and faith. And what did it mean to them? Not just that a good man had been unjustly sentenced to death. Not only that he had died forgiving those who had put him there. Many other men, before and since, have died thus. No, Paul saw the deep meaning of Christ's death in the light of his faith that God was in Jesus. The staggering thought here is that God is suffering and sacrificing *himself*. Throughout the centuries men had believed that God must punish mankind for its evil and wrongdoing. They had seen the judgment of God in disasters and in personal tragedies. Now they see that God himself suffers for their sins. He is not the kind of God who can remain aloof and unmoved by all the terrible suffering of his children. In no other way could God reveal his concern for all that men have done to make their lives unhappy than by entering into their sorrow himself.

When we believe that God was in Jesus, and when we see Jesus suffering on the cross, then we know how very serious our pride and selfishness is, and how terribly destructive are our attempts to satisfy our own desires at the cost of others' happiness. There is constant suffering and death in the world and we can, if we wish, close our eyes and our hearts to it—at least until it comes right into our own lives. But we cannot evade Christ on the cross, for he is all the suffering in the world concentrated in one great agony. He is the suffering of God, and we cannot escape him, who created us and who speaks his own words to our minds and hearts. The words he speaks, Paul believes, are words of sorrow and pain and love. They are God's answer to the words spoken by Jesus when he said, "Father, for-

give them, for they know not what they do." But we hear not only words of forgiveness from God when we see Jesus upon the cross. We hear also our own hearts accusing us. We *do* know what we have done. We know it now, as we could not know before. Whenever and wherever we have aided injustice, prejudice, or violence—in whatever ways we have injured others and added, by our positive acts or by our refusal to act, to the suffering of any of our fellow men—then and there we have crucified Jesus again. We have wounded the heart of God, and he who loves us suffers for our sins.

The Cost of Love

Do you see how deeply Paul had entered into fellowship with Jesus, even though he had never known him in his years on earth? Jesus had compassion on those who did not know what they were doing. He never reproached them or spoke bitterly to them. He did use words of scorn and indignation against those who knew what they were doing and were too proud and selfish to change their ways. But for the many who were ashamed of what they had done, and could find no better way, Jesus had only understanding and love. He forgave them and showed them a better way. Christ's forgiveness, so freely given, was not some light gift, bestowed without cost to himself. It was not only because of the proud and mighty and their sins that he had to face the death of the cross. Those who were forgiven their blindness and misunderstanding of the teachings of those who had gone before him—yes, and of his own teachings, too—they also were responsible. God's love is a costly gift. It is only when we see how much his love costs that we understand how great it is and how unworthy we are to receive it. Jesus had to die in order that we should know these things. God had to suffer. When we say Jesus Christ our Lord, we are admitting humbly that we never knew how much God loves us until we saw him in

Christ upon a cross. But now that we know, we give our lives to him in grateful devotion.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Was Paul right when he decided to "know only Christ and him crucified"? Should he have continued to argue with the philosophers as he once did in Athens? Is it possible by philosophy alone to come to full knowledge of God?

2. Does the thought of the immensity of space, the millions of light years between our earth and other solar systems, make you feel lonely and lost? Why, or why not?

3. If human beings were really to know God, could there have been any other way for God to give that knowledge than by becoming man?

4. Jesus said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." He also said, "I and the Father are one." Does that mean that when we feed the hungry children of Europe and help to clothe those who are suffering, we are also serving God? What does this mean in regard to cruelty and violence in killing thousands with an atomic bomb? Are we causing God to suffer?

5. Would we have Christianity as a faith and fellowship today if Jesus had run away from danger and death?

God's Love and Ours

1 Corinthians 13

LET US NEVER forget that Paul, in all of his letters, is talking about the gospel as the good news of God's love. We are certain that God loves us, because he has given us Jesus Christ. For Paul, Christ is the love of God in action. In Jesus Christ, as we have seen, we really come to know God. This is far more than knowledge *about* God; it is fellowship with God. For the gospel is not only news about who God is and what he does. It is the news that God is with us. The little groups of Christians who first received from Paul the letters which we now are able to read so many centuries later, were more sure of that last fact than of anything else. They knew that God was very near to them, for they had a vivid sense of the presence of Christ among them. Since they knew that Christ was God's love come into human life, they were filled with the knowledge of the love of God. Their first thought, always, was one of gratitude to God for his great love in the gift of Jesus Christ to them. If ever they should forget that, Paul warned them, all their fine words about God and their worship of him would be without meaning. Furthermore, they would cease to have love for each other. Let us see what Paul has to say to the Corinthian Christians, and to us, about the relationship between God's love and ours.

Unchanging Love

We have already spoken of the first thing that Paul said, but he spoke of it so often that it is right that we should come back to it again and again. God's love is the kind that suffers. God seeks us and desires to have us do his will, and thus to know the only true happiness that we can ever know. But he will not force us. He has given us the gift of freedom. We are not bound to him by any ties other than those of love, and love does not compel. If we want to go our own way, we can. That would mean, of course, living as though there were no God, and we probably would end up by trying to act like little gods ourselves. If we love ourselves enough and can disregard others sufficiently, we may come to the conclusion that the world really revolves around us and that all things were made to serve us. This is actually rather difficult to do, for almost inevitably we discover that a few other people must be included along with ourselves in the select company for whom the world was made. This sort of foolishness, in which most of us indulge some time or other, may not seem very serious until we begin to see that most of the terrible suffering of the world is due to it and to nothing else. Wars are caused by the terrible tendency of men and nations to organize the world around themselves, regardless of what this may do to others. Millions of murdered men and women and children, and other millions whose homes and possessions have been ruthlessly torn away, are victims of just this kind of thinking and living.

Why does God not stop us and prevent this awful suffering? It is a strange answer to give and it does not solve some of our most difficult problems of faith, but this is the answer that Paul sees as he lives in fellowship with Christ: God can win us only by love, and love cannot compel, it can only suffer. Here is the wonderful fact about God's love: It is not in any way changed

by the fact that we reject it and turn against it. God does not love us because we are always good and loyal to him. He loves us because he is God and it is his nature to love. Our actions *do* make a difference, but not the kind that we might suppose. They do not alter God's love, but they do alter the way in which we experience that love. If we can imagine ourselves wholly responsive to the love of God in every moment of our lives, we can also sense that we would never need to know the sorrow and suffering that is part of God's love. For others, Christ upon the cross might mean something personal, but for us it could mean only that there is sin in the world, though not in us. Of course this is just speculation, because there is no one, no matter how good he may be, who does not know that he has *not* loved God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength, and his neighbor as himself. But even if one such perfect person did exist, God's love for him would be no greater, no more complete than it is for the most evil and degenerate creature who has ever lived. The evil and the corruption in that person, as well as the selfishness and pride in us, cause God sorrow and pain, and that is part of his love—but the love is undiminished.

"Love Never Fails"

God's love is infinite and does not depend upon the lovableness of those to whom it comes. Because we are not always lovable, it is a suffering love. To these two great truths about God's love, Paul added a third—which he also discovered through his comradeship with Christ—that the love of God is the most powerful reality in all of our experience. We have said that God cannot force us to love him. Yet we must also admit that his love is almost irresistible. Paul never felt that he needed to say anything to prove this, other than to speak again the gospel message. Are we not living testimonies to the truth that God has so loved us that he gave Christ to us? And can we deny the

power of that love? Are not our hearts moved and our lives changed? What is the meaning of our fellowship if it is not that we are able to love each other because Christ loved us and gave his life for us and for all men? When Paul speaks of the love of God in this way, he is also speaking about the love of men. What is our love but a reflection of and an answer to God's love for us?

We turn instinctively at this point to the one place in all of his letters where Paul speaks most clearly and beautifully of the meaning of love. When we read Chapter 13 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, we realize at once that he is speaking about a kind of love which is possible only for those who have received the love of God in their hearts and who now seek to love others as God loves them. For Paul begins by saying that nothing can be ranked with love in importance. Neither eloquence nor wisdom nor faith nor charitable instincts nor fanaticism can stand without love. If we do not have love, none of these things has any value. And this means that if we do not have fellowship with God, everything that *is* ours is worthless. For only by means of this fellowship can we have the kind of love Paul speaks about. This becomes even more clear as he describes love:

"Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7)[1]

This is a description of the love that we know only as a gift from God. Could any of us honestly claim that we have ever known this kind of love? Have we ever loved anyone without feeling the slightest trace of envy or jealousy? Have we ever loved

[1] From *The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament*, copyrighted 1946 by the International Council of Religious Education, and used by permission.

so purely that we have not sought at some time our own good rather than that of the one we love? Have we never been angry or hurt? Has our love never failed? We know the answer to all these questions, but it is not an answer that brings discouragement. Paul is speaking here of a love that is not our own, but which can be ours through faith in God and trust in his love. The last section of this "Hymn to Love" makes quite clear the fact that Paul is speaking of a love that leads us, a love that we know but cannot fully express in our human loves. For he says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. (1 Corinthians 13: 12)[2] It is God who fully knows us, with all our faults and failures, and yet loves us with "patient endurance."

The Law of Life

And if God so loves us, says Paul, let us also love one another. Who among us can boast about himself? Viewed against the truth of so great a love, our little virtues about which we talk so much seem petty indeed. And how can we justify our contempt of the mistakes and weaknesses of others, when we realize that God does not love them any the less because of these things? If we are inclined to set up standards by which we shall judge who is worthy to receive our affection and confidence, do not these standards seem terribly petty and artificial when seen in the perspective of this self-forgetful love? There is nothing more pitiable, in Paul's opinion, than the kind of narrow self-righteousness which excludes true affection because it has rejected God's gift of love. If we are to live with our brothers, says Paul, let us acknowledge that God loves them as much as he loves us; and let us not imagine that we are any more deserv-

[2] *Revised Standard Version of the New Testament.*

ing of that love than they are. With a true understanding of ourselves and of them, and with the help of the God who loves us, we find it possible to begin to love. The more we love, the wider grows our circle of affections, and the more certain we become that love is the law of life.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Can you give examples of individuals or groups who have sought to organize the whole world for their own benefit? Can they succeed?

2. Why do we say that love cannot use force? Would it be better if God could and did force us to do his will? Why, or why not?

3. Are we able to love others without regard for their intrinsic qualities of lovableness?

4. Is it easier for us to love others if we ourselves are certain that we are loved? To be specific, do you think you are able to be kinder and more loving than a homeless, orphaned war refugee, simply because you have always known a home and the love of parents? What does this tell us about the way wars start and seem to grow out of past wars?

5. Do we really believe that God loves Japanese, Germans, Jews, and Negroes as much as he loves us? If we believe it, why do we act as though we did not?

Fellowship and Freedom

1 Corinthians 14:1–13, 34–35

WHEN WE TRIED to understand what Paul means by God's love for us and the love we must have for him and our fellow men, we concentrated our attention upon the best known portion of his letters: the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. But we too often stop there, failing to go on to the next chapter which, though it does not have the great poetry of the thirteenth, offers practical advice of the utmost importance for the Christian life. In many places in his letters Paul talks about the meaning of freedom for the Christian and the responsibilities that this freedom entails; but in this single chapter he brings together most of his thoughts on the subject and presents them in a most direct and practical way.

Women in the Church

As an illustration of how practical—and how controversial—Paul can be when he wishes, look at the last paragraph of this chapter. Some of you are not going to like Paul's words here, but you must admit that this is a man who knows his own mind. Listen to what he has to say, as his words written in the common Greek language of his day are translated into the plain English of our own:

As is the rule in all churches of the saints, women must keep

quiet at gatherings of the church. They are not allowed to speak; they must take a subordinate place, as the Law enjoins. If they want any information let them ask their husbands at home; it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church. You challenge this rule? Pray, did God's word start from you? Are you the only people it has reached?—*I Corinthians 14: 33-36* [1]

That ought to take care of the question of women in the church for all time! Seriously, however, these words should be a warning to us. We must not make an idol out of Paul and fall down and worship him. He can be wrong and, like most great men, when he is wrong he is very wrong. Here Paul, who is always warning his followers not to fall back into subjection to the Jewish Law with all its rules and regulations, appeals to that very Law to justify his attitude toward women and their place in the church! We can at least say that his practice seemed to be a little better than his preaching at this point, for his letters contain a great many words of appreciation of various women who were apparently very important in the life of the Christian fellowship. But let them hold their tongues in church! I do not think I need add that even the most self-assertive males in the Church, our church at least, have given up any idea of keeping the women silent, and I suspect that on this point there may be a good many feminine contributions to the discussion.

Religious Enthusiasm

When we go back to the beginning of this chapter and read through it, however, we may be prepared to deal less harshly with Paul for his attitude toward women speaking in church. Apparently, at Corinth anyway, everyone was talking in church

[1] From *The Bible: A New Translation* by James Moffatt. Copyright 1935 by Harper and Brothers. Used by permission.

—and very few of them were making much sense. This is a situation which we, with our rather formal church services in which only the minister does the speaking, are ill-prepared to understand. Perhaps an illustration from our own lives may help, though it must be understood that no such illustration can do more than hint at the thing Paul was dealing with—which was religious enthusiasm gone wild.

You know how it is with you in your Sunday school class or Pilgrim Fellowship meeting on the day after a big game. Some of the frenzy of those thrilling last minutes of the game is still with you, and when you begin to talk about it each of you excites the others a little bit more and soon everyone is talking and no one is being heard, but everyone is having a grand time. A little bit of that goes a long way, however, and soon someone has to try to bring some order out of chaos and get you back on the track of the discussion—which was not football, but Paul.

Now, our trouble is that we can scarcely imagine getting so excited about our religious beliefs and experiences that discussing them would be just like the chaotic and wonderful reliving of the last moments of a big game. But the people in Paul's day were that excited, and some in our time are, too. Something has happened to them that takes them right out of the ordinary humdrum world in which they live and makes them live an entirely different life for a while. Paul certainly did not make light of such an experience. He knew what it meant to hear a voice and be blinded by a great light. Not only on the Damascus Road, but also at other times in his life, this had happened to him. Often, while he is writing letters away from others and in quite a calm mood, his emotions will rise and he will speak in wonderful words of what it means to live with Christ. No one could have written that great thirteenth chapter unless he was capable of being carried away by great feelings. I am sure his first words to us would be, "Why are you so cold and indifferent

about your faith? Why don't you get excited and feel the thrill of being a part of the Christian fellowship? Are you dead, or alive?"

"Speaking in Tongues"

With the Corinthians the problem was not spiritual deadness and lack of enthusiasm. They were alive all right. They were so filled with enthusiasm that they all wanted to talk at once, and they were "speaking in tongues." It is a strange expression, but what it means is quite simple. Instead of using ordinary words, which everyone could understand, they were using a strong ecstatic type of language. Again, though it is a different world, the football game helps. When the game becomes really tense, it isn't organized cheering (and what a queer language we use there!) which takes place, but everyone babbling in some strange language of excitement, understood by no one, but generally appreciated because everyone is in the same mood. That is about what the Corinthians were doing in their meetings—and Paul didn't like it much. As we have said, he didn't object to enthusiasm. The important point was that everyone's enthusiasm should be useful and helpful, not for himself alone, but also for everyone else. If you speak in 'tongues' says Paul, pray that you may be given the gift of interpreting what you say. If no one can understand you, what good is it for you to speak? And if some outsider came in and heard everyone speaking in strange language and no one interpreting, he would be quite justified in thinking they were all crazy. As you read this chapter you will see that Paul minces no words. There is one great principle: Everything must be done "for edification."

Freedom Is to Serve Others

This word "edification" is one that we are not much acquainted with. It is a good word. What it means is that every-

With the Corinthians the problem was not spiritual deadness and lack of enthusiasm. They were so filled with enthusiasm that every one wanted to talk at once.

thing done by a Christian must be done with the welfare and encouragement of his brother Christians in mind. Then you must add to that the fact that the whole Christian community is seeking to live in such a way that others outside it will be helped and brought into this fellowship. Paul can and does apply this principle to many different areas of life. A Christian is free, he holds. A Christian does not live by hard and fast rules and regulations. He has been set free from this kind of religious bondage by his faith in Christ. But this freedom is not something he can use without regard for others. His freedom is a freedom in fellowship. Everything he does must build up rather than destroy the freedom of others. It is a strange but persistent truth about life that only the strong can be free. Paul knew very well that there have to be rules for those who are weak, and they have to be forced to do those things which are for their own best interests. But he knew also that all men and women have a deep desire to rise above those rules and to be able to govern themselves rather than being governed by others. He believed that Jesus had taught and lived and died in the demonstration of a kind of freedom of the spirit and the body which was possible for all men if they learned how to live by faith. He knew that such living had to be learned in a fellowship where everyone helps everyone else, and all seek not their own ends, but the good of others.

The Christian Fellowship

Not in Corinth or in Ephesus or in Philippi or in Rome was this ideal of the Christian fellowship fully realized. Paul's letters are ample proof of this. The Christians had to be warned not only against speaking in strange tongues which could not edify, but also against many practices which were harmful for the new and less experienced members of the fellowship. There was jealousy, gossip, criticism, envy. But the great truths were

always in some way preserved, and more and more those who were on the outside looking in on the Christian groups saw something admirable and enviable there. What they saw was a group of people who really cared for one another, people whose freedom took the form of mutual support and unselfish service. In those cities of the Roman Empire, as in our cities today, it was pretty much "dog eat dog" and "every man for himself." But in the churches was something quite different. In these small groups a man was not alone, for he had friends who cared about him, not at all because of what he could do for them, but rather because of what they could do for him and he and they together for others.

There is nothing tame or commonplace about this kind of freedom in fellowship. This is something like the morale which they talk about in armies—the spirit of a group of men whose very existence depends upon the willingness of each man to think not about himself and his own safety, but about the whole company. The trouble is that we have been able so seldom to get this kind of morale in our peacetime, constructive activities. What Paul is talking about, and what the Christian groups were experiencing, is that marvelous morale which comes in groups that have a purpose greater than any individual plan and a fellowship richer than any private joy.

If you feel that Christianity has not done this for you, you will not be alone in your conviction, of course. The thing to remember is that Christianity could never have survived as a movement in history except for the fact that successive generations of men and women did have this great experience of freedom in fellowship. And, never forget, many Christians are having it today. It will never come to us as long as we think of our Christianity as a private affair, something between ourselves and God. Paul says in this chapter, ". . . he who speaks in a 'tongue' addresses God, not men; no one understands him; he is talking

of divine secrets in the Spirit. On the other hand he who prophesies addresses men in words that edify, encourage, and console them." (1 Corinthians 14: 2-3) [2] There is little doubt as to which Paul considers more valuable. He is asking us so to speak and so to live that others will be edified, encouraged, and consoled.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Do you know churches today where Paul's view of the place of women is upheld? Can you give an outstanding example of an action of a national church body which expresses the opposite conviction?

2. Have you ever attended a modern service where people spoke "in tongues"?

3. Do you think our churches lack enthusiasm?

4. Do we have in our church life an experience of fellowship like that which Paul was seeking for the Corinthians? If not, what is it that we lack?

5. Have you ever been part of a group which had such a high morale that your life seemed to take on new meaning because of your membership in this fellowship?

6. Do Christians need fellowship—or can we get along in our religious life quite well by ourselves?

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God for Us, God with Us

Romans 8:31–39

PAUL, in his great letter to the Christians in Rome, cries, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8: 31b [1]) Then he goes on to answer his own question by reciting a list of life's great tragedies and powerful forces, none of which can ever separate the Christian from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. When you read these verses, Romans 8: 31-39, you will see at once that Paul is talking about experiences which are very real to him. He knew what it meant to face calamity and persecution, danger and the sword. His life was to end in that great city to which this letter was sent, and Paul must have been almost certain that in the end he would be called upon to die for his loyalty to Christ. When he asks the question "If God is for us, who can be against us?" it is not merely what we call a rhetorical question. It is the most searching question of all. Unless the Christian can answer it as Paul does, asserting that with God on his side no enemy and no adversity can overcome him, his Christianity is only an illusion which cannot endure testing. Let us take time, therefore, to ask ourselves what it means to be able to say, "God is for us."

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No Easy Way

If we are to be true to Paul, we ought perhaps to consider first what it does *not* mean to have "God for us." It certainly does not mean that we will get life served up to us on a special platter with all difficulties removed, all hardships banished, all defeats eliminated. Whenever we begin to think that our religion ought in some wonderful way to protect us, and that God is not really God if he allows us to suffer—then we are beginning to place our trust in God on a very shaky foundation. Again and again in the letters of Paul, in the Gospels, and in the other books of the New Testament, we find the reminder that the life of Jesus, though it was filled with joy and characterized by perfect obedience to the Father's will, ended in terrible suffering on the cross. But this suffering is not to be understood as abandonment of Jesus by his Father, and certainly not as punishment. The meaning of suffering is that by it, and by the way in which we accept it, we are brought to a deeper understanding of faith and love, trust and patience.

It is not easy for us to understand these early Christians who welcomed suffering and even death. Why? Because it gave them an opportunity to demonstrate, as Jesus had done, their faith in God and their devotion to his will and purpose. Paul never sought to avoid suffering, nor did he go out of his way to seek it; he knew that it would come as a matter of course if he were true to his chosen task. When it came, he saw it as part of the divine process of strengthening his faith. Earlier in this letter to the Romans he says, ". . . we triumph even in our troubles, knowing that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope—a hope which never disappoints us, since God's love floods our hearts through the

[2] From *The Bible: A New Translation* by James Moffatt. Copyright 1935 by Harper and Brothers. Used by permission.

holy Spirit which has been given to us." (Romans 5: 3-5 [2]) When God is for us, we do not avoid trouble; we triumph in it. Even the great mind of Paul was never able fully to comprehend and explain the great evils all of us must encounter, but he knew, more surely than he knew anything else, that when we run into trouble we have the certain knowledge of God's love for us.

God for Us

"God for us" then means God's love for us. God loves us when we are unworthy of that love, long before we begin to respond to his love. Paul never tires of reminding us of this, and holds that we cannot really know that God *is* for us until we know how much we need him and how little we have done to deserve his help. All through history some men have objected to this thought, and there are many today who say that Paul fails to give us credit for our almost instinctive desire to be good and to merit God's love. Paul would not deny that we have good impulses, nor would he deny our desire to know God and love him. Yet he insists that the great and central truth is that we would never be able to know God and love and serve him, if he had not first loved us. All the best intentions and all our striving could never give us even a hint of what is ours so fully because God has come to us in love and forgiveness. One honest, steady look at ourselves and our world is enough to convince us that we need forgiveness. What we know as we look at ourselves is our great need. What we know as we look at Christ is that God has met our need with his love. That is "God for us."

God with Us

Paul speaks also very often of "God with us." In the passage we looked at above, from the fifth chapter, he speaks of God's love which "floods our hearts through the holy Spirit which has

been given to us." To understand in all its fullness the meaning of salvation (for this is what Paul is talking about) we must put these two things together. God is for us—we know that he has forgiven us and loves us with a steady, unchanging love on which we can depend in every moment of our lives. This does not mean that we can do wrong and not pay the price, that we can live like animals and not be ashamed. Rather it means that even though we pay a heavy price and are deeply ashamed, we can yet know that God has not given us up, but has made it possible for us to live with certain hope that we can do better and find a higher way. All this we know because Jesus Christ has demonstrated in unmistakable terms that God is love.

We do not depend for our hope solely upon a demonstration which was made twenty centuries ago in Palestine. We know not only that God is *for* us; we know also that he is *with* us. This knowledge was just as important for the people with whom Paul lived and worked as it is for us today. They had never seen Jesus (though some of them may have listened to men who had) and they needed, just as we do, something more definite and tangible than someone else's testimony. How can we know for ourselves that in Jesus Christ we see God as he really is? We need to know this is true by the testimony of our own experience. Paul assures us that we do know it when the love of God floods our hearts. This is the Holy Spirit at work in us. This is God with us. Here Christianity finds its greatest power and its deepest meaning.

What Is the Holy Spirit?

Paul suggests that it is not what happens to us in life that matters most. Now Paul was no romantic escapist. He knew that life is real, that it is often a battle, and that it matters a great deal what we do from day to day. No one could have done all he did without having a very realistic view of the importance

of daily events. Still he could say that these events in themselves are not the most important things in life. What matters most is our own spirit, our willingness to see our difficulties and disappointments, not as defeats which we bitterly resent, but as a part of our spiritual education, a contribution to our understanding of ourselves and to the growth of our sympathy with others. What really counts in our times of success is not the victory in itself, the confidence we gain, or the prestige—but the use we make of the new power and influence that comes to us. What are we striving for in life? What do we really consider important? These are the things that count. And it is when we see life in this way that we begin to understand the primary importance of the Holy Spirit.

Don't be afraid of those two great words. What Paul, and every great Christian, means by them is something very familiar to us all. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are aware of the fact that God is with us in all that we think and all that we do. This is a wonderful feeling, and of course we do not always have it. Perhaps some men and women, those who have sought more persistently than we have to know God and to live out his love as it was revealed in Christ, are aware most of the time of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This does not make them act in any queer and mysterious way. They are simply more helpful, more understanding, more ready to turn aside from their own private affairs to help anyone who may need them. They are the people who make this world a better, more hopeful place. They get discouraged, too, but their discouragement never makes them bitter or cynical or complaining, for they know that God's love will show them the way and will give them the strength they need to walk in it.

You have often felt the presence of the Holy Spirit—in a beautiful service of worship; in moments of quiet contemplation of the loveliness of this world; at times when you have lost your-

self in a task too great for you, and one which promises no personal rewards, but only the immense satisfaction of having advanced a good cause. In such moments you have known what it means to forget yourself and to feel surrounded and upheld by the love of God. To live in this way more and more, to face any circumstance with the certainty that it cannot destroy this sense of security—this is to know and possess the Holy Spirit.

Salvation

There is another word—perhaps a disturbing one—which we used a while ago. It is that word "salvation." Probably you would resent it, or at least feel slightly uncomfortable, if anyone should say to you, "Are you saved?" You would not know quite what to say. And I am not sure that Paul would have known how to answer that question. It is not the kind of question he would ask. Yet he *was* concerned about salvation. For him, salvation was not something that has happened once and for all—something that is now finished, about which we can speak with absolute assurance. Of course, we *can* speak with absolute assurance about what God has done. We know that his love has been demonstrated once and forever in Jesus Christ, our Lord. But as for ourselves, life is not over. In fact, it has just begun.

The really important question is: Are we living the life of the spirit? Are we trusting the love of God and seeking to let that love shine forth in our living? Are we living, not for ourselves alone, but for others, that they too may know what the love of God means in the life of man? Of course, the knowledge that God is for us and with us is itself salvation, but salvation is life, and life is constant growth and development. Let's not worry about whether or not we are saved. If we worry too much about it, it is probably a rather certain sign that we have not learned to trust God. Let others, if they wish, decide what our

status may be. What the world really needs is, not an estimate of our state, but a demonstration of life without fear, life free from envy and hatred, life filled with love and trust and steadied by obedience. When Christians live that way, something far more powerful than churches or sermons or missionary projects begins to work in the world. That something is Christ, for wherever Christians realize and live the life of the Holy Spirit, Christ lives, as he lived in Paul and in the early Christians. The trouble with us may be that we are so timid, so afraid of facing the facts about our Christianity. The facts are quite simple. Salvation means Christ living *in us.* God is for us—that makes it possible. God is with us—that makes it real.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. How often do we pray to God for a special favor: to escape from some unpleasant situation or danger? Should we pray for these things at all? Would it make a difference if we added the words, "Nevertheless, thy will, not mine, be done"?

2. Have you known people who seemed to triumph over the troubles that came to them? What has seemed to you to be the secret of their strength?

3. Does the knowledge that God forgives us make us any less sorry for the wrong we have done? In thinking about this, remember what was said earlier about the cost of forgiveness.

4. Is it true that victory and defeat are less important in themselves than is the attitude with which we enter into both experiences? A football coach may be fired if he loses too many games, but would you want as friend and counselor in a crisis in your life someone who had never been defeated?

5. Do you think we should give up words like "Holy Spirit" and "salvation," because many people today do not understand their meaning? Or should we put new meaning from our own experiences into them? Could you do this?

Christ for All the World

Galatians 3:1–5 and 4:1–7

You remember that Paul began his work with his partner Barnabas among the Greeks in Antioch, Cyprus, and Galatia. It was not easy for the leaders of the church in Jerusalem to accept the idea that non-Jews could become part of the Christian fellowship without accepting any of the requirements of the Jewish law. The principal leaders were James the brother of Jesus, Peter, and John the son of Zebedee. (You will remember the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, who asked for places of honor on the right and the left of Jesus when he should come into his kingdom. James had already been put to death.) These men saw no reason to admit to the Christian fellowship those who were not already loyal to the Law or willing to accept its requirements. Jesus, like themselves, had been a Jew, and though he criticized some of the ways in which the Law had been interpreted, he never denied the importance of the Law. Though his own people had rejected him, his few faithful followers believed he would return to establish his kingdom in power and glory. And they took it for granted that this kingdom would be the same that was long ago promised to the sons of Abraham—it would be a Jewish kingdom, and the sign of membership in it would be those marks of the good Jew under the current religious and political situation.

Freedom from the Law

We have seen how different was Paul's conception of Christianity. He saw the Jewish Law, not as a necessary part of the preparation for entrance into the kingdom of Christ, but rather as a barrier that must be broken down. It was his conviction that the coming of Jesus with his wonderful gospel meant the end of the Law with all its requirements. Now, in order to do the will of God, it was necessary only to have faith in what God had done and to live in loyalty to the teachings of Jesus—believing in him as Savior and expressing the meaning of salvation in life, not in ritual.

In his first experiences in preaching the gospel to the Greeks, Paul had learned how forceful this gospel could be when it was separated from the Jewish legal requirements which were, after all, of little significance to those who had not received instruction in Jewish history and religion from their earliest days. Paul had no desire to eliminate entirely the Jewish background of the new religion. He was very careful always to emphasize the great contribution of the men of faith in an earlier day and to point out that their faith was really no different from that required now. But he refused to place upon these new converts from the Greek world the restrictive regulations of the Jewish Law. The gospel meant freedom from the Law!

In these early days of his work, Paul discovered that there was a conflict between himself and the Jerusalem leaders. With his customary boldness in action, he went directly to these leaders to defend his practice—and he took with him his co-worker, Barnabas, and a Greek convert named Titus. It was typical of Paul that he was not satisfied merely to tell about these Greeks who had received Christ. He brought with him a living example. So a very important conference took place in Jerusalem in the year 48. There were present not only the leaders whom we

have mentioned, and Paul, Barnabas, and Titus, but also some whom Paul called "Judaizers"; those who were insisting that all Christian converts, Jew or Greek, must fulfill all requirements of the Jewish Law. Paul deeply resented the presence of these men, for he felt that they were undermining much of the work he was doing. He saw a momentous issue here, a great value at stake. If the Judaizers won, Christianity would remain a little Jewish sect and would soon die out. It would not be able to win many Greeks, and it was regarded with contempt by most Jews. If Paul knew anything of the intention of Jesus, he was sure that he knew this: that Jesus had never intended to restrict the great gift of God's love and forgiveness to one people. He was certain, with a conviction which sprang directly from his own experience, that God had given Jesus Christ to the whole world in order that the whole world might know his forgiveness and love. Christianity *must* be universal, else it would be meaningless.

It was this profound conviction and the experience which had produced it, as well as the actual results of his missionary work, which enabled Paul at the Jerusalem conference to sweep away the objections of the others. Titus provided a sort of test case. The Judaizers demanded that he be circumcised in accordance with Jewish Law. Paul strenuously objected and won his point. But such an important decision, affecting the whole future of Christianity, was not to be made finally in one moment. Even Peter, who first entered quite fully into the spirit of the new agreement and entered into full fellowship with the Greek Christians (it was unheard of for a Jew to eat with non-Jews), was later persuaded by some representatives from Jerusalem that he had gone too far. This influenced others, and finally even Barnabas was won over to what might be called the isolationist position. Paul was shocked by this change of attitude and saw clearly that he must not permit it. Once again he courageously opposed Peter, whose claim to leadership was

based strongly on his very close association with Jesus, and James, the brother of Jesus. Paul insisted that Christianity must not depend upon the way a man prepared and ate his food, or upon anything else so superficial, but upon a changed heart. So Paul reaffirmed the great teachings of the prophets who declared, as they spoke for God:

> ". . . it is love I delight in, and not sacrifice;
> Knowledge of God, and not burnt offerings."

World-wide Christianity

However reluctant the opposing party may have been, Paul was permitted to continue in the way he had come thus far. Those who took the other side did not give up their practise of requiring all Christian converts to accept the Jewish Law, but with the great success of Paul's mission in the Roman Empire, the importance of the Jerusalem group of Christians waned, while that of the Christian bodies in the West grew in importance. Paul possessed not only religious insight, but very practical understanding of the world also. He knew that the future of Christianity as a world religion must be in the great world now ruled by Rome and not confined to that little corner of it where the Jewish religion had developed. As a grateful son of Israel, he understood that the great faith he now possessed could never have come to the world if the Hebrew people had not been true to their ancient covenant with God. But he also knew that now that faith must be given to all the world. In Christ, God, who had made himself known in the history of a people and through the great prophets of that people, had come in the flesh, not to that people alone, but to dwell among his whole human family. To bring the knowledge of Christ to all the world was the amazing mission of Paul. It is even more amazing to realize that before his death in Rome, he had largely

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accomplished his task, for he had established little communities of Christians in the important centers of life in the Roman Empire. Later generations of Christians could carry on.

We must not look at all this with calm and detachment, as though it were ancient history. The battle Paul fought for a universal Christianity is never finished. What he was saying in his day was that no small group of men had the right to exclusive possession of the Christian gospel. No such group could decide on what terms others might receive Christianity with all its great benefits. The teachings of Jesus and the knowledge of his life and death must be free to all men. Let everyone come to this great stream of living water and drink. No one should bar the way. If Paul had not fought successfullly for this great principle of freedom, we today might not even know about Jesus and his revelation of God.

The Christian Claim

But Paul emphasized another aspect of this truth about Christianity. Of course, it is important that no one be denied the right to know Jesus and join his company. Christianity must never be exclusive. There must never be rules and regulations which bar anyone from entrance into the Christian fellowship. But also, it is important that Christianity should never accept the limitations that others outside the Christian community may wish to put upon it. This conviction and its consequences will always be stated in love and not with arrogance—but we are untrue to our faith if we do not state it. Many would like to have us believe and act as though ours were just one religion among many. After all, they say, is it not more tolerant to admit that there are many approaches to God, each with its own value and significance, none with any absolute claim? This kind of thinking is very attractive to us today, for we have seen clearly the terrible results of religious fanaticism.

Paul would not for a moment defend intolerance, but he would have us understand that we are being untrue to our faith if we put it on a par with all other religions. If Christ is truly the revelation of God, that revelation is unique. Often we speak about the other religions without much knowledge of them, and we speak of our own with little more understanding. It is a fact, as Paul clearly saw, that Christianity's claim *is* unique, for it claims a sure revelation of God in a man who lived and taught and died on earth. In Jesus the Christ, God came into this world. If this be true, then no man should ever be barred from fellowship with Christ, and no Christian can ever be content with the statement that Christianity is only one of several equally valid ways to the knowledge of God.

The Christian Future

The consequences of this double assertion we must examine more carefully in our closing session, for they affect the lives of all of us. In a word, however, they certainly imply that our Christianity is a poor imitation of Paul's if we fail to be, as he was, world-minded. We must be content with nothing less than a whole world won for Christ and the gospel. Perhaps we have heard words like these in the past and considered them old-fashioned. They are anything but that. It is only in our own day that the great urgency of this world task of Christianity has been clearly seen, for only in our time has the destiny of all the world's people been seen clearly as a common destiny. It is we who are young today who must begin to fulfill Christianity's great promise. If we utterly fail, there may be little opportunity for another Christian generation for centuries to come.

One of the world's great historians, Arnold Toynbee, has surveyed the rise and fall of many civilizations, and he believes that our present civilization may destroy itself with its atomic weapons and other instruments of warfare, unless men generally

can regain a vital faith in God and in the spiritual forces of life. Mr. Toynbee also believes that such a faith can come only through Christians, and probably not the more comfortable Christians, like ourselves, but from some of the younger, even the so-called 'backward' Christians—those who have only recently received the good news of Christ, those who have suffered for their faith in Jesus' teachings as the way of life; those who see in Jesus a challenge to break down all economic, social, and racial barriers and establish true brotherhood. Thousands of such people in China, India, and Africa have found the secret to the meaning of all life in the humble yet glorious person of Jesus.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What are some of the ritual observances required of a Jew today? Why do members of the Roman Catholic Church not eat meat on Friday? Have we any such requirements in our church?

2. Is there anything to be said for Peter in his shifting from one position to another regarding Christians and the Jewish Law? Can you remember any other time when Peter said one thing and did another?

3. Are there any in the Church today who correspond to the "Judaizers" of Paul's day in their insistence on particular rituals as a sign of Christian discipleship?

4. Do you find it difficult to believe that Christianity is unique? Or, to put it another way, do you believe that God is truly and fully revealed only in Christ—and not in Mohammed or Confucius or Buddha?

5. A Chinese Christian has said of us, "You take your Christianity too much for granted. I am glad I am a first-generation Christian, for I know how much it means to be Christian." Do you think he was right?

Our Christian Task

1 Thessalonians 5:1–24

Often the result of reading about some great figure in history is a double-barrelled shot of discouragement. We say, "That man was practically superhuman in the things that he did. He never gave up, always had courage, never failed to do what he wanted to do." The next reaction is one of despair. We think, "I could never be that way. I'm always getting confused and discouraged. Besides, what he did can no longer be done. Things are different now." Both of these reactions are natural, almost inevitable, when the life of a great man is portrayed in such a way that the very human failings are not revealed and only the great achievements are stressed. It is always tempting to do this, especially when little is known of the details of a man's life and the centuries since his death have firmly established the great value of his contributions.

Despite the intimate picture we have of Paul in his letters, we have seen that there is really very little information about his life—not much of what we call biographical material. We do know that the Christian Church could not have come into being in the Roman Empire had it not been for Paul's work. Since the history of Western civilization, as you know, is dependent upon Graeco-Roman culture and civilization, we can fairly conclude that we have a Christian basis for our civilization only be-

cause Paul did his pioneering work. It is, in fact, difficult to overestimate the importance of Paul.

Paul Was Not Perfect

But you and I are primarily interested in Paul as a man and as a Christian. We admit his importance for the history of Christianity and for Christian thought, but we want to get behind all that and find his meaning for our own lives. Therefore, it is especially important that we do not "glorify" him. If, thus far, hearing about Paul has made you feel that he was just a bit too good to be true, let us now review briefly some of the things we *do* know about him. He began his career as a persecutor of Christians, a sort of religious spy and informer. He was a young man of violent and narrow conviction, not at all motivated by broad, generous principles of love. After his conversion, he remained limited in some of his views, showing the lasting effects of his earlier religious training. As his letters clearly show, he was capable of strong emotion—not only affection, but also resentment, jealousy, and wounded pride. When he was swayed by these emotions he could and did write angry letters, upbraiding his friends for their foolishness and faithlessness.

Not only was Paul a prey to strong feelings, he was very obviously subject to some kind of physical disability of a serious order. He speaks of a "thorn in the flesh," and some who have studied his life carefully are convinced that he was subject to attacks of epilepsy. At any rate, he was not an imposing physical specimen. He was probably short, thin, a bit stooped, sallow of complexion. But in spite of all that, we cannot forget his tremendous physical exertions and the hardships he endured. We may well wonder whether a winner in the Greek games (the ancient Olympics which Paul so much admired and from which he took some of his best illustrations) could have endured so much. Paul was apparently not a very good speaker. He men-

tions rivals who apparently made a greater impression than he could on certain groups of people. These rivals were better-looking and smoother in speech and manner. Paul did not claim to be a charmer. He was not interested in winning personality contests.

No, Paul was not perfect, and he would be the first to insist that he was not. If we could talk with him, and if we were to indicate a great admiration for his courage and persistence, he would probably be greatly surprised. He might even speak very harshly to us, for he was always annoyed when men praised him instead of remembering that he was only a representative of Jesus Christ. Paul did not speak for himself and he had only contempt for those who spoke for themselves. Whenever he spoke of his own accomplishments or sufferings it was to emphasize the fact that Christ had enabled him to do these things and to endure. The one thing that we can be impressed with as we look at Paul is his utter devotion to the one whom he knows as Lord of his life. "Not I, but Christ who liveth in me": that is Paul's motto.

When we see that this is true, and when we realize that Paul's life was constantly threatened by weakness within and handicaps and dangers without, we may be able to throw off the hampering weight of that second natural reaction to greatness. We can no longer honestly say to ourselves that we could never do what Paul has done. True, we may not be able to repeat his accomplishments in detail. Each person works with the possibilities that are before him, and our tasks are not those of Paul. But if it had been true, in his own time, that no one could do what he did, there would be no Christian Church in the world today. If the men and women of Corinth, Rome, Thessalonica, and Galatia had looked in wonder at Paul's work and then shrugged their shoulders and gone back to their accustomed way of life with the regretful remark that "of course we cannot be expected

to match his enthusiasm and dedication," I do not have to tell you what the result would have been. We would not even possess the letters of Paul, for of course it was the churches in these places that preserved the letters he had written to them. The very first letter Paul wrote—to the Thessalonians—is a letter of joy and gratitude written when he had received word, after leaving them, that they had carried on the work he had started, and that they had shown the same courage and purpose and faith that they had seen in him when he was with them. Paul *expected* those to whom he had brought the gospel to live by its light and power. When they failed to do so he was deeply grieved and he knew there must have been something wrong with his work or some misunderstanding on the part of those who had heard him. He did not even exempt these ordinary people from the requirement that he accepted—that of dying, if need be, for their faith.

To Be Like Jesus

The first thing, then, which we must understand about our Christian task is that it is the same task for all of us—it differs in no important way from the task that Paul faced. What is that task? Simply to be like Jesus. Yes, it is as great and as simple as that. To be like Jesus, not because we think we have the ability, but because we have the closest fellowship with him. If we are to be like him we must in fact have his Spirit in us. We must live in him and he in us. This is the foundation of the Christian life. We begin by accepting in gratitude the great gift of Jesus Christ—his life, his teachings, his death for us, and, above all, his power of love in our lives. The distinguishing mark of a Christian is that in his living he demonstrates the fact that Jesus Christ *is alive*. This is not so much a task as an act of faith, making possible the accomplishment of all tasks that may be laid upon us. The important thing to remember—

the thing that Paul says over and over again—is that we do not outline for ourselves a great many fine things to do and then begin to seek the help we need to do them. We first acknowledge our great need of Jesus Christ, then admit him to our lives, and then—and only then—receive the vision to see and the strength to do his work in the world.

For the Kingdom of Christ

When we know Jesus we know what he wants us to do. This is Paul's message to us. His letters are filled with practical advice to Christians concerning their responsibilities, but he is always at the same time talking about "knowledge of Christ" and "faith in Christ" and "the work of the Holy Spirit." Let us return for a moment to some of the ideas with which we began—ideas drawn from the world of sports, of which Paul was apparently fond. When we play football or basketball or baseball for our school or college we must put in many hours of training, and we have to learn the skills and tasks involved in our particular position. But behind all that there is something greater that motivates all that we do. That is loyalty to the school itself—a desire to uphold its great tradition of hard and sportsmanlike play. We are not out for glory for ourselves alone (or if we are, we are not really much use to the team) but for a greater glory which can come even in defeat.

So it is in Christianity. We work not for our own glory, but for the greater glory of Jesus Christ. These words can have great meaning for us if we put him and his kingdom first. Think what that means. He wants men to think of each other as comrades, not enemies. He desires men of all nations, all races, and all colors to live together as brothers. He asks men and women to serve one another gladly and to find out how happy life can be when no one is afraid of what another may do to him out of greed or envy or distrust. These are the things Jesus desires, not

for himself, but for us—that we may know ourselves to be indeed the children of a loving Father. When we come to know and love Jesus, we find ourselves dedicated to these great ends, to the kingdom which he would establish among us and for which he gave his life. Viewed in the abstract as fine principles, these may all seem impossible goals, but when we see them as part of our fellowship with Jesus they become warm and personal. We know that without his help we could not even begin to realize these goals, but that with his companionship and with the help of all who have been joined in the Christian fellowship, we can establish this kingdom.

The Christian Fellowship

That task will require the constant devotion of all of us. Just as it would be quite impossible for any one of us, without the help and companionship of the living Christ, to express the faith and love that are required of the Christian—so it is impossible for any Christian by himself to do much to bring others to this way of life. The important truth about the Christian fellowship is that it is here that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is first realized. It may not seem so to us, as we look at the life of our churches and Pilgrim Fellowship groups, but it is true that in the Christian fellowship men find an experience which proves that the gospel is true. Here they find sacrificial love, and a fellowship in which color and social position and race make no difference. They are impelled by the actions of others to forget themselves and to think of others' needs. They discover that the good life can be exciting, adventurous, and rewarding. This is what the Christian fellowship does, and this is why it has lived through the ages. This is what it can be for us and for others in our time. It is our task to help it to be such a fellowship, as will change the world, beginning in our own homes and churches and communities.

Jesus Christ Is Lord

In the troubled days just before the outbreak of the Second World War, a World Conference of Christian Youth was held in Amsterdam. Never before had Christians from so many countries gathered together in one place, and these were *young* Christians. All of us there knew that war was likely to come soon, and when war did break out it was a long and terrible ordeal for many of those who were present. Those in occupied countries suffered especially, for they were cut off from all contact with those in other lands, and many were severely punished for their Christian loyalty. Since the war some of us who were more fortunate have talked with those young people. Again and again they have spoken of the days at Amsterdam as the source of inspiration and hope during the long years of war. For it was in those days that they and we came to understand the meaning of the Christian fellowship—a fellowship unhindered by the border lines of race, color, and creed. The watchword of that Conference was *Christus Victor*—Christ the conqueror.

Since the war, a second World Conference of Christian Youth has been held at Oslo, Norway. The watchword of this Conference was, "Jesus Christ is Lord." So we return to the great words of Paul. The whole of Christianity—its promise and its requirements—can be summed up in these ringing words. If, in our own lives and in the Christian fellowship we can say and mean and live these words, "Jesus Christ is Lord," then our Christian duties will become ever more plain and we will find ourselves accomplishing them with certainty and consistency. Paul, with all of his greatness, can do no more than bring us to the One who is *his* leader, comrade, and Lord. When we come to him, when he lives with us—then the adventure begins for us, and it is an adventure that never ends, for life with Christ is eternal life, life without boundaries of any kind.

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